Intraparty Conflict in State Republican Parties

By

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Abstract

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Each major American political party has a history of conflict from within its own ranks. Waged mostly by party factions—groups attempting to influence the party's activity, leadership structure, or ideological direction—intraparty conflict has appeared to increase in recent decades in the Republican Party. While extant political science research is already unclear about what precipitates intraparty conflict, even less is known about intraparty conflict at the sub-national level. This dissertation seeks to fill these gaps by employing a comparative case study of eight state Republican parties, focused on on three periods of heightened Republican intraparty conflict over the past few decades: the Christian Right era, the Tea Party movement, and the emergence of Donald Trump and Trump Republicanism in more recent years. I hypothesize that the linkages between political groups in states, the design of the state party itself, and status of two-party competition within the state give rise to conditions that may exacerbate or attenuate intraparty conflict. I also explore the relationship between polarization and nationalization by studying the development of state Republican parties relative to their national equivalent, the Republican National Committee.

After selecting and studying eight state Republican parties from Utah, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Colorado, California, Michigan, Iowa, and North Carolina, I find ample support that the strength of relationships between a state's political groups, and the designs of state parties themselves, can drastically affect the likelihood of intraparty conflict. Strong relationships between the state party, Republican elected officials in the state, and state government ensure that the state party is not a monolithic source of influence in the event of insurgent party takeover. Furthermore, the rules and bylaws of a state party organization may render it more or less durable to intraparty conflict. An active and powerful state convention, opportunities for "grassroots" participation or influence, and leadership structural design are all examples of features that may spur insurgent party factions into conflict. Finally, I find mixed support that two-party competition in a state leads to less intraparty conflict, although it appears that the minority party in one-party states is more likely to experience intraparty conflict. I conclude with several broader takeaways from the case study and propose future directions for research.

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I started graduate school as an excited and anxious 22-year-old in the fall of 2016. A lot has happened since then, including three presidential elections and a global pandemic. I wrote field exams, a master's thesis, and several completed prospectuses for dissertation ideas (making me uniquely good—or uniquely bad—at writing them, depending on how you look at it). On a personal level, I spent nearly a third of my life in the program, navigating my identity as an adult and trying to figure out what kind of person I aspired to be. The highlights and hardships of life experiences during these formative years are irrevocably interwoven with my graduate school experiences, for better or for worse. This means that there's a lot of people to thank who are responsible for my development as both an academic and as a person.

My interest in American politics began long before showing up to Berkeley. Jeff Holt and Joseph Tusing were instrumental to my love of the subject, as well as heavily influential to my pedagogical approach when I teach. At the University of Florida, I was fortunate enough to graduate with degrees from both the political science and economics departments. Within the political science department, Dan Smith gave me valuable opportunities for research, mentored me, and inspired me to apply for graduate school. Brian Amos and Charles Dahan, while graduate students themselves at the time, were helpful and patient with me as I became acquainted with political science research. In the economics department, I owe much of who I am today to Thomas Knight and Mark Rush. Both Thomas and Mark demonstrated to me that it was possible to pursue a research agenda, uphold a teaching commitment, and manage a thousand other daily tasks with grace and professionalism. Throughout my undergraduate years, Thomas was my professor for multiple classes, my employer, my honors thesis advisor, and an invaluable source of guidance for myself and many others.

Once I arrived at Berkeley, I was grateful to be surrounded by so many kind and talented faculty members. Jack Citrin, Paul Pierson, and Rob Van Houweling helped set the foundation for what I consider my research interests today. Joel Middleton, Thad Dunning, Jas Sekhon, and Sean Gailmard helped tackled my methods training. I was also lucky enough to work more closely with Gabriel Lenz, Amy Lerman, and Laura Stoker during my time in the program. Gabe was quick to help new students navigate graduate school, and some of my happiest memories as a graduate student were meeting with him and his other graduate student instructors between classes. Amy was a fantastic professor to learn from, and her enthusiasm for important research inspires everyone around her (I have seen this countless times firsthand). Finally, Laura was formative to my early years as a graduate student, elevating my ability to evaluate and conduct research more than anyone else possibly could. It is rare in academia to find someone like Laura, who is so generous with both her time and brilliance. I consider myself fortunate to have been her student.

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there to help me push forward when my path in graduate school was at its most unsteady. It is not an exaggeration to say that I would not have been able to write a dissertation, much less still be in the program, if not for Erin's steady encouragement and optimism.

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This dissertation doesn't happen without the assistance of fellow graduate students, friends, and family. My own cohort felt unique in its camaraderie and level of support for each other, despite our large range of research interests, so I am grateful for every single one of them. Outside of my cohort, I would like to thank Rachel Bernhard, Julia Christensen, Brad Kent, Andrew McCall, Anna Mikkelborg, David Nield, Neil O'Brian, and Alan Yan for their levity and encouragement throughout the years. Finally, I would like to thank Sean Freeder, Alexander Stephenson, and Elizabeth Mitchell Elder. Sean, for his continuing inspiration to me as a teacher, professor, and friend—both before and during a global pandemic. Alex, for being a gym partner, a vital resource when it comes to coding, and a fantastic friend. And Elizabeth, my American politics partner-in-crime for many years, for her brilliance, work ethic, and wit.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Over the past few decades, American political parties at all levels of government have been increasingly influenced by ideological factions who tend to push for more extreme positions, like the Christian Right movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Parties have also drawn fire from another type of faction: one that seeks to influence the party on behalf of individual candidates like Pat Robertson or Donald Trump. Still other factions, like the Tea Party, blend elements of grassroots organization while pushing for specific Republican candidates with sufficient ideological purity. I refer to "factions" throughout to describe all types of groups within a party organization attempting to influence the party's activity, leadership structure, or ideological direction. This definition includes establishment or moderate wings of a political party when they are pitted against another intraparty group.

Sometimes factions represent the status quo, able to accomplish their goals within the party relatively peacefully; other times, the goals are instead realized through intraparty conflict. Both of the national parties are prone to factional influence, and American political science has documented this relationship well. An understudied component of factional influence, however, is how it may proliferate through the state and local party systems, not just the national ones. State and local parties offer crucial resources for elected officials and candidates across all levels of American federalism, and prior studies have shown how party positions, like support for civil rights, emanated from these sub-national parties before the national ones.[1] Party outcomes also vary significantly at the subnational level: factions can completely capture entire organizations, or can fail to emerge as a threat to the party in the first place. A blind spot of existing political science literature is understanding exactly the extent of this state party capture, when it happens, and precisely how factions accomplish their goals. Thus, the purpose of my dissertation is to study intraparty conflict in state parties and explore the conditions through which party factions gain influence within state parties.

The contemporary party system in local, state, and national politics is dominated by the combined forces of polarization and nationalization. The pattern of polarization, defined as the growing disparity in political positions between Democrats and Republicans, is supported by an extensive foundation of literature demonstrating its presence among political elites,[2] the mass public,[3] and media coverage over the past several decades.[4] Nationalization–referring to the increasing homogeneity of parties across subnational units–[5] was spurred in part by the rapid

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[1] E.g. Schickler, Eric. "Racial realignment: The transformation of American liberalism, 1932-1965." (2016): 1-384.

[2] Poole, Keith T., and Howard Rosenthal. "A spatial model for legislative roll call analysis." *American journal of political science* (1985): 357-384. 1985; McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. *Polarized America: The dance of ideology and unequal riches*. MIT Press. 2016.

[3] Mason, Lilliana. *Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity*. University of Chicago Press. 2018.

[4] Hopkins, Daniel J. *The increasingly United States: How and why American political behavior nationalized*. University of Chicago Press. 2022.

[5] Hopkins, Daniel J., Eric Schickler, and David L. Azizi. "From many divides, one? The polarization and nationalization of American state party platforms, 1918–2017." *Studies in American Political Development* 36, no. 1 (2022): 1-20. 2022.

expansion of the federal government in the 1960s and 1970s: key developments in social policy, regulatory agencies, and the civil rights movement permanently entrenched the federal government in a wider range of issue areas.[6] When political power consolidated nationally, interest groups correspondingly increased their efforts on advocacy in the nation's capital.[7] Finally, changes in media structure and media consumption make it harder for voters to pay attention to state issues compared to national ones.[8] The polarization and nationalization of America's political system is readily visible in political elites and the mass public alike.

Broadly speaking, the upward trends in polarization and nationalization appear consistent over time. NOMINATE scores, for example, show how Democratic and Republican House members have incrementally polarized to levels not seen since the 19th century.[9] Mason (2018) shows that partisans in the mass public have gradually felt less close to, and increasingly dislike, the out-party group over the same period (p. 73).[10] Evidence of nationalization in the American political system is more subtle but nonetheless appreciable: the correlation between U.S. House vote choice and presidential vote choice at the district level has risen to 0.95 in 2012, a relationship that is three times stronger than it was in the 1970s;[11] and national issue coverage has substantially increased due to the actions of conglomerate media companies controlling local news programming.[12]

While polarization and nationalization can be seen quite clearly in national politics, evidence at the state-level party system is more mixed. State parties' political agendas have grown to resemble each other more closely since 1990.[13] National ideological groups like the "right-wing troika" of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), State Policy Network (SPN), and Americans for Prosperity (AFP) might be a factor: their influence often results in state-level candidates adopting clear, nationally-focused, issue positions.[14] In Michigan, for example, former Governor John Engler and ALEC heavily targeted Michigan to cut back on public employee bargaining opportunities in 2011.[15] Colorado had a middling

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[6] Skocpol, Theda. *Diminished democracy: From membership to management in American civic life*. Vol. 8. University of Oklahoma Press. 2013; Jones, Bryan D., Sean M. Theriault, and Michelle Whyman. *The great broadening: How the vast expansion of the policymaking agenda transformed American politics*. University of Chicago Press. 2019.

[7] Leech, Beth L., Frank R. Baumgartner, Timothy M. La Pira, and Nicholas A. Semanko. "Drawing lobbyists to Washington: Government activity and the demand for advocacy." *Political Research Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2005): 19-30. 2005.

[8] Hopkins, Daniel J. *The increasingly United States: How and why American political behavior nationalized*. University of Chicago Press. 2022.

[9] McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. *Polarized America: The dance of ideology and unequal riches*. MIT Press. 2016.

[10] Mason, Lilliana. *Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity*. University of Chicago Press. 2018.

[11] Abramowitz, Alan I., and Steven Webster. "The rise of negative partisanship and the nationalization of US elections in the 21st century." *Electoral Studies* 41 (2016): 12-22. 2016.

[12] Martin, Gregory J., and Joshua McCrain. "Local news and national politics." *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 2 (2019): 372-384.

[13] Hopkins, Daniel J., Eric Schickler, and David L. Azizi. "From many divides, one? The polarization and nationalization of American state party platforms, 1918–2017." *Studies in American Political Development* 36, no. 1 (2022): 1-20. 2022.

[14] Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. *State capture: how conservative activists, big businesses, and wealthy donors reshaped the American states--and the nation*. Oxford University Press. 2019.

[15] Ibid, 181.

amount of right-wing troika affiliates in the state in 2012, but was almost entirely captured by them by 2015, demonstrating the potential destabilization of state political systems by these groups.[16] Yet this explanation also fails to tell the whole story. New York, for example, went from being one of the most targeted states by these groups to one of the lowest– yet the New York state Republican party remained relatively stable during this time period.[17]

Factions seeking ideological goals, in particular, appear to target Republican organizations more than Democratic ones. Longstanding differences between the parties themselves may explain the closer linkage between Republicans and these types of factions. The Republican party has a history of being more ideological than the Democratic party, focusing on popularizing and then incorporating conservative ideals into a unified ideology.[18] For most of the 20th and 21st centuries, on the other hand, the Democratic Party may instead be defined by its operation and management of coalitions of social groups.[19] That is not to say that ideological movements never happen among Democrats: urban Democratic parties encountered significant overhauls as liberal reformers wrested control from machine leaders for much of the 20th century;[20] the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) attempted to sway the party away from its increasing embrace of liberalism in the 1990s;[21] and clashes in Democratic parties between moderates and progressives have increased over the past decade.[22] Liberal or progressive ideological factions, attempting to emulate the successes of ALEC on the other side of the aisle, are also in their nascency.[23] Taken together, the possibility that the inherent differences between the two parties are changing needs to be accounted for and studied.

It is increasingly apparent that several, if not most, state parties have emerged as crucial battlegrounds pitting the party establishment against intraparty factions. Some of the most notable intraparty conflicts, like the Christian Right and the Tea Party,[24] have been researched in political science, but this research tends to centralize around national-level political actors. The study of state- and local-level political parties, meanwhile, is a much more recent development in American political science. Additionally, some of the cases most familiar to the extant political science literature come long before the trends of polarization and nationalization that I have described, and some even happened before the parties had entirely sorted (e.g. the New Right and Dixiecrat movements). Clearly, there are many dynamic forces in play that can determine a party faction's success or failure in influencing their party organization.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid, 181; 202.

[18] Grossmann, Matt, and David A. Hopkins. *Asymmetric politics: Ideological Republicans and group interest Democrats*. Oxford University Press. 2016.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Wilson, James Q. "The Amateur Democrat in American Politics." *Parliamentary Affairs* 16, no. 1 (1962): 73-86. 1962; DiSalvo, Daniel. *Engines of change: Party factions in American politics, 1868-2010*. Oxford University Press. 2012.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Malpas, Amelia. "Bringing the Party Home: The Progressive Insurgency in the House of Representatives and its Impact on the Democratic Party." PhD dissertation. 2022.

[23] Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. "Explaining liberal policy woes in the states: The role of donors." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49, no. 3 (2016): 461-465. 2016.

[24] Wilcox, Clyde. *Onward Christian soldiers?: the religious right in American politics*. Routledge. 2018; Blum, Rachel M. "How the tea party captured the GOP: Insurgent factions in American politics." In *How the Tea Party Captured the GOP*. University of Chicago Press. 2020.

In this dissertation, I employ a comparative case study approach to explore the processes through which intraparty factions may gain greater influence over eight Republican state party organizations. There are several reasons for the emphasis on Republican parties. Republicans appear to be more extreme and susceptible to ideological factions than their Democratic equivalents.[25] Ideological conflict within Republican parties appears to more frequently spill over beyond the party structure, posing a greater danger to states and the country. Kleinfeld (2021), for example, finds that political violence is on the rise with far-right and white evangelical Christians as its most outsized supporters;[26] and states under Republican leadership produce legislation that worsens democratic health in their states across a bevy of measures.[27] After a review of the extant literature on intraparty conflict in both the national and subnational context, I provide some operational definitions, my research design, exploratory hypotheses, and an outline of the dissertation.

Review of Existing Work

Intraparty Conflict in National Politics

Historically, there have been many examples of factions within parties that spur voter mobilization and ideological shifts. Coalitions of Democrats in northern states, for instance, were early advocates of civil rights, predating the national party's platform by decades.[28] In contrast, Southern Democrats were fueled by a desire to retain the Jim Crow status quo, causing elites in the region to balk at the civil rights and organized labor components of New Deal programs.[29] This schism culminated in the Dixiecrat movement and an eventual realignment of the national Democratic Party. For Republicans, the New Right voices of William F. Buckley and his National Review staff propagated a conservative identity among whites that resulted in harsh opposition to racial integration and an emphasis on states' rights.[30] Espousing many of these policies, Barry Goldwater launched an insurgency within the Republican Party in the years before his 1964 presidential campaign, pushing the party rightward to an embrace of New Right conservatism.[31]

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[25] McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. *Polarized America: The dance of ideology and unequal riches*. MIT Press. 2016; Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. *State capture: how conservative activists, big businesses, and wealthy donors reshaped the American states--and the nation*. Oxford University Press. 2019.

[26] Kleinfeld, Rachel. "The rise of political violence in the United States." *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (2021): 160-176.

[27] Grumbach, Jacob. *Laboratories against democracy: How national parties transformed state politics*. Vol. 184. Princeton University Press. 2022.

[28] Schickler, Eric. "Racial realignment: The transformation of American liberalism, 1932-1965." (2016): 1-384. 2016.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Lowndes, Joseph E. *From the new deal to the new right: Race and the southern origins of modern conservatism*. Yale University Press. 2008.

[31] Taylor, Andrew. "Barry Goldwater: Insurgent conservatism as constitutive rhetoric." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21, no. 3 (2016): 242-260. 2016.

The electorate is now more "sorted" on the basis of policy and ideological preferences than during the period of the New Right and the Southern Democrats,[32] but both national parties still encounter distinct entities within their ranks. The nature of the two-party system in the United States is such that sub-party groups generally need to enact change from within this hegemony– as opposed to other political systems which offer ample room for multiple parties.[33] Nowadays, the competing factions are described with labels such as "the establishment", "populists", "outsiders", "moderates", and so on. The actual aims and membership of any of these specific factions vary widely based on context;[34] but the enduring presence of these broad players underscores the frequency of intraparty conflict observed at the national level.[35]

The Tea Party's impact on the national GOP is emblematic of contemporary intraparty conflict. An interesting feature of the Tea Party is its simultaneous influence on establishment Republicans from the bottom-up and the top-down through pro-business elites.[36] The success of Tea Party-endorsed candidates in the 2010 primaries represented a significant break from the Republican establishment by demonstrating the formal party's loosening grasp over the selection of its own candidates, winning 39 out of 129 races for election to the House in 2010.[37] While the era of the Tea Party movement is considered over,[38] it laid the foundation for the national Republican Party over the next decade through at least partially enabling the rise of Donald Trump.[39] And in Congress, powerful Tea Party-inspired voting blocs like the Freedom Caucus exhibit profound influence over the entire Republican side of the aisle, to the extent that they were pivotal actors in the election (and later removal) of Kevin McCarthy as the Speaker of the House in 2023.

The Tea Party movement brought the idea of "grassroots" activism back to the forefront of modern Republican discourse. The term, however, tends to be utilized as a positive blanket term for candidates or movements while lacking a more precise definition. The first usage of the term "grassroots" occurred in the wake of the New Deal, where farmers were encouraged to participate in their local agricultural committee meetings.[40] Some academics feel similarly with this definition of a participatory citizen-fueled "grassroots"; Bullock (1991), for example, refers to "grass roots" campaigns as run by county-level candidates with small constituencies, and suggests that these candidates will find greater success at higher office than candidates with

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[32] Levendusky, Matthew. *The partisan sort: How liberals became Democrats and conservatives became Republicans*. University of Chicago Press. 2009.

[33] Ranney, Austin. *Curing the mischiefs of faction: Party reform in America*. Vol. 3. Univ of California Press. 1975.

[34] Bonikowski, Bart. "Three lessons of contemporary populism in Europe and the United States." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2016): 9-24. 2016; Levitz, Eric. "The GOP's establishment is more populist than its Trumpists". *New York Magazine*. March 3, 2021.

[35] DiSalvo, Daniel. *Engines of change: Party factions in American politics, 1868-2010*. Oxford University Press. 2012.

[36] Skocpol, Theda, and Vanessa Williamson. *The Tea Party and the remaking of Republican conservatism*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

[37] Rauch, Jonathan. *Re-engineering Politicians: How Activist Groups Choose Our Candidates--Long Before We Vote*. Brookings Institution. 2017.

[38] Blum, Rachel M. "How the tea party captured the GOP: Insurgent factions in American politics." In *How the Tea Party Captured the GOP*. University of Chicago Press. 2020.

[39] Skocpol, Theda, and Caroline Tervo, eds. *Upending American politics: Polarizing parties, ideological elites, and citizen activists from the Tea Party to the anti-Trump resistance*. Oxford University Press. 2019.

[40] Neuse, Steven M. "From grass roots to citizen participation: Where we've been and where we are now." *Public Administration Quarterly* (1983): 294-309. 1983.

different backgrounds.[41] Under these circumstances, one may define the grassroots as community- or citizen-led, exclusively at the local level. On the other hand, "grassroots" organizations increasingly emanate from the top-down, a sign that the term itself has become a bit of a misnomer. For example, while the Christian Right had ample successes in the 1990s that could be attributed to the "grassroots", much of the success was actually owed to national leaders like Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed–each of whom poured millions of dollars into local church groups to mobilize their members for local-level electioneering.[42] Neuse (1983) similarly warns that the financial and organizational superiority of national groups might dwarf the original usage of "grassroots" as purely citizen-led participation.[43] At the very least, care should be exercised in how the term is used, and I will attempt to clarify what is meant by the "grassroots" when I make reference to it throughout the dissertation.

Contemporary intraparty conflict among Democrats may lack the magnitude of a Tea Party movement or significant grassroots activism, but there are nonetheless signs of tension within the formal organizations. The national Democratic party must also balance its various social groups while dealing with internal pushes from ideological factions. For example, the "middle of the road" approach from New Democrats tried to move the party to the ideological middle throughout the 1990s, remaining liberal on social issues while espousing moderate or conservative fiscal policies like welfare reform. Within the Democratic Party, the New Democrats alienated the increasingly-visible progressive wing.[44] Most recently, ideological tensions arose within the Democratic Party in the build-up to the 2016 presidential election and its aftermath. Progressives backing the nomination of Bernie Sanders in 2016 pushed for open nomination procedures and to dethrone establishment insiders in the party, while Clinton supporters endeavored to maintain the status quo.[45] The end result largely reduced superdelegates' influence over the presidential primary in favor of rank-and-file voters. Additionally, primary wins by progressive House of Representatives members Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Jamaal Bowman over their longstanding incumbent opposition suggest a leftward shift in the Democratic Party that was absent only a decade or two ago.

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 represents the beginning of the most recent intraparty conflict within national Republican circles. Throughout Trump's first administration, he wielded his influence as the most powerful Republican to re-shape the RNC to prioritize his reelection attempts and his ideology.[46] Despite losing in 2020, Trump continued to hold power within the RNC by nominating his second consecutive RNC chair, Michael Whatley, in early 2024. The Trump campaign's strategy of drilling down vertically to deepen his base's support

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[41] Bullock, Charles S. "Republican Strength at the Grass Roots: An Analysis at the County Level." *American Review of Politics* 12 (1991): 80-99. 1991.

[42] Conger, Kimberly Horn. *Grassroots activism and party politics: The Christian right in state republican parties*. The Ohio State University. 2003.

[43] Neuse, Steven M. "From grass roots to citizen participation: Where we've been and where we are now." *Public Administration Quarterly* (1983): 294-309. 1983.

[44] DiSalvo, Daniel. "The death and life of the New Democrats." In *The Forum*, vol. 6, no. 2. De Gruyter. 2008.

[45] Masket, Seth. *Learning from Loss: The Democrats, 2016–2020*. Cambridge University Press. 2020.

[46] Heersink, Boris. "Trump and the party-in-organization: Presidential control of national party organizations." *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (2018): 1474-1482. 2018.

(as opposed to other presidential campaigns seeking to broaden their base) has made the RNC a "formidable vehicle" for the promotion of his brand and his ideology.[47]

Intraparty Conflict in State and Local Party Politics

State political parties are uniquely poised to recruit prospective candidates and ultimately develop them for placement in higher offices over time.[48] Party officials use personal appeals to recruit candidates into running, an inversion of the belief that the ambition of potential candidates is the primary mover of their entrance into running for public office.[49] Yet, the state party's grip on candidate recruitment has weakened in recent years as outsider groups have become more prevalent in the states. Not subjected to campaign finance laws that affect many state parties, "purist" donors can raise orders of magnitude more money for ideological purposes than for the formal party organization.[50] Scholars suspect this leads to changes in the types of candidates recruited to run for office. The question of whether a state party pushes for more centrist candidates than outsider groups,[51] or if they indulge in the party base's apparent preference to nominate more extreme candidates is an especially recent debate in this field. In particular, Broockman et al. (2021) uses experimental evidence to show that GOP county chairs favor extremist candidates much more than Democratic chairs do (although chairs of both parties prefer extreme candidates to centrist ones).[52]

State parties also have the responsibility of handling caucuses or primaries in coordination with the national party and in compliance with state laws and regulations. Going beyond this largely administrative role of organizing the state's primary and overseeing elections, it is at the state level where such small-d democratic election laws like district redrawing, early voting and voter ID requirements are decided. A state's policy direction has become more in-line with the party in control of the state legislature, with a corresponding decline in cross-cutting pressures.[53] Therefore, a state party with unified control of government enjoys immense latitude to expand (or contract) these types of democratic policies as they see fit.[54]

The ramifications of unified government handling election-related policies can be observed in many states. For example, when North Carolina Republicans secured a majority in

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[47] Galvin, Daniel J. "Party domination and base mobilization: Donald Trump and Republican Party building in a polarized era." In *The Forum*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 135-168. De Gruyter. 2020.

[48] Doherty, David, Conor M. Dowling, and Michael G. Miller. "The conditional effect of local party organization activity on federal election outcomes." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 31, no. 3 (2021): 368-387. 2021.

[49] Broockman, David E. "Mobilizing candidates: Political actors strategically shape the candidate pool with personal appeals." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 1, no. 2 (2014): 104-119. 2014.

[50] La Raja, Raymond, and Brian Schaffner. *Campaign finance and political polarization: When purists prevail*. University of Michigan Press. 2015.

[51] Ibid; Persily, Nathaniel, ed. *Solutions to political polarization in America*. Cambridge University Press. 2015.

[52] Broockman, David E., Nicholas Carnes, Melody Crowder-Meyer, and Christopher Skovron. "Why local party leaders don't support nominating centrists." *British Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 2 (2021): 724-749. 2021.

[53] Caughey, Devin, and Christopher Warshaw. "Dynamic democracy: Public opinion, elections, and policymaking in the American States." In *Dynamic Democracy*. University of Chicago Press. 2022.

[54] Grumbach, Jacob. *Laboratories against democracy: How national parties transformed state politics*. Princeton University Press. 2022.

both chambers of their legislature for the first time since the 19th century, they quickly passed a highly restrictive voter ID law that was intended to target black voters in the state.[55] While contemporary research downplays the effectiveness of most of these election policies on electoral outcomes,[56] any policy that targets a large, politically homogeneous share of the voting population (e.g. felon disenfranchisement reform in Florida)[57] or is implemented retroactively on an election (e.g. the aftermath of the 2000 presidential election in Florida)[58] should "raise serious alarms".[59]

Ideological groups like ALEC have been identified for their roles in shaping policies, like voter ID laws, in state legislatures. Knowing that state elected officials are subject to time and budget constraints while in session, outsider groups like ALEC, SPN and AFP effectively subsidize these costs by providing a series of "model bills" to their members–around a third of all state legislators.[60] Tellingly, this right-wing "troika" set themselves up to shape policy agendas and legislative outcomes in 2010 as Republicans in many states gained a legislative majority.[61] The policy agenda during this period pushed by ALEC, for example, included stand-your-ground laws, right-to-work laws, and voter ID provisions.[62] The efforts of the partnership between ALEC and their state legislator members were highly productive: by 2013, eight states had identical stand-your-ground, right-to-work, and voter ID laws.[63]

What happens when party factions wage conflict within state and local party organizations? Understanding the role of the Tea Party at the local and state level is a good starting point. Rachel Blum has laid extensive groundwork for understanding how and why the Tea Party rose rapidly within the GOP. Local and state Tea Party networks coalesced much more frequently in Republican-leaning districts;[64] complemented by strong grassroots support, the Tea Party established a firm presence at the subnational level.[65] Some states, like Ohio and Virginia, had larger Tea Party networks than others, and 88 percent of Tea Party communities were

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[55] Herron, Michael C., and Daniel A. Smith. "Race, Shelby County, and the voter information verification act in North Carolina." *Fla. St. UL Rev.* 43 (2015): 465. 2015.

[56] Grimmer, Justin, and Eitan Hersh. "How election rules affect who wins." *Journal of Legal Analysis* 16, no. 1 (2024): 1-25. 2024.

[57] Morse, Michael. "The future of felon disenfranchisement reform: how partisanship and poverty shape the restoration of voting rights in Florida." *California Law Review* 109, no. 1 (2021): 1-91. 2021.

[58] Hasen, Richard L. *The voting wars: From Florida 2000 to the next election meltdown*. Yale University Press. 2012.

[59] Grimmer, Justin, and Eitan Hersh. "How election rules affect who wins." *Journal of Legal Analysis* 16, no. 1 (2024): 1-25. 2024.

[60] Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. *State capture: how conservative activists, big businesses, and wealthy donors reshaped the American states--and the nation*. Oxford University Press. 2019.

[61] Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander, Theda Skocpol, and Jason Sclar. "When political mega-donors join forces: how the Koch network and the democracy alliance influence organized US politics on the right and left." *Studies in American Political Development* 32, no. 2 (2018): 127-165. 2018.

[62] Nichols, John. "ALEC disbands task force responsible for voter ID, 'Stand Your Ground' laws." *The Nation* (2012). 2012.

[63] Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander. *State capture: how conservative activists, big businesses, and wealthy donors reshaped the American states--and the nation*. Oxford University Press. 2019.

[64] Blum, Rachel M. "How the tea party captured the GOP: Insurgent factions in American politics." In *How the Tea Party Captured the GOP*. University of Chicago Press. 2020; Skocpol, Theda, and Vanessa Williamson. *The Tea Party and the remaking of Republican conservatism*. Oxford University Press. 2016.

[65] Rouse, Stella M., Charles Hunt, and Kristen Essel. "Growing tea with subnational roots: Tea party affiliation, factionalism, and GOP politics in state legislatures." *American Politics Research* 50, no. 2 (2022): 242-254. 2022.

specific to a single state.[66] Regardless, the downstream effects of the Tea Party include the GOP's embrace of hardline stances on immigration and law and order, with an electorate increasingly driven by fear from right-wing reactionary conservatives.[67]

Research Design

As a first step, it is necessary to precisely establish what is meant when referring to "intraparty conflict" and describing a "victory" by a "party faction". Political scientists in this field of study have employed diverse terms and definitions in the past to describe this general phenomenon: Mayhew (1986), for example, made distinctions between "regulars" versus "insurgents" operating within the same party organization, and described the conflict between them as "intraparty factional competition".[68] In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars like Green et al. (2000) broadly refer to the Christian Right movement as a "social movement", although they also assign the label "intraparty factionalism" to the more specific action of the Christian Right confronting Republicans within the party.[69] Conger (2009) also refers to the Christian Right as an "intraparty faction", which aims to "capture" the Republican party in question.[70] Finally, the Tea Party movement has been described as both an "intraparty insurgency" and a "destabilizing faction" by Blum (2020).[71] In recent years, even more incendiary rhetoric has been seen frequently in headlines to describe Trump Republicanism, such as "cult-like" or a "crusade", meant to "take over" the Republican Party.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the term "party faction" to describe a distinct subset of members within a party. Christian Right activists, Tea Party members, and pro-Trump Republicans who participate in a Republican party may all qualify as party factions– yet, under this definition, "the conservative wing", the "establishment", "mainstream Republicans", and "moderates" would all be classified as party factions as well. When multiple party factions can be identified and fight over some concrete objective, they are undergoing "intraparty conflict". Objectives described in this dissertation may include changing the party's platform to reflect a faction's preferred political beliefs, contesting Republican incumbents in primary elections, and seeking greater representation in party leadership and officer positions. Finally, I define a "victory" as a deliberate disruption to the party's status quo at that moment in time. Therefore, "party factions" can generally be categorized into two groups: either belonging to the status quo of the party at that moment, or a so-called "insurgent" party faction.

Employing this definition of "victory", Kentuckian Rand Paul's surprising U.S. Senate primary victory in 2010 may be credited to the Tea Party, as was U.S. Senator Bob Bennett's

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[66] Blum, Rachel M. "How the tea party captured the GOP: Insurgent factions in American politics." In *How the Tea Party Captured the GOP*. University of Chicago Press. 2020, p. 52.

[67] Parker, Christopher S., and Matthew Barreto. "Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America." In *Change They Can't Believe In*. Princeton University Press. 2014.

[68] Mayhew, D. R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986.

[69] Green, John C., Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, eds. *Prayers in the precincts: The Christian right in the 1998 elections*. Georgetown University Press. 2000.

[70] Conger, Kim. *The Christian Right in Republican State Politics*. Springer. 2009.

[71] Blum, Rachel M. "How the tea party captured the GOP: Insurgent factions in American politics." In *How the Tea Party Captured the GOP*. University of Chicago Press. 2020.

equally surprising primary loss to Tea Party activists at the 2010 Utah Republican state convention. In both cases, national organizations and Tea Party networks identified an opportunity to undermine the "status quo" of Kentucky and Utah Republican politics, respectively, and carried out myriad fundraising and mobilization efforts to fruition. On the other hand, examples like the elections of Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey, Iowa U.S. House Representative Steve King, and North Carolina U.S. Representative Mark Meadows would *not* constitute Tea Party victories, despite the three's deep ties to the Tea Party since 2010. In none of these cases were Tea Party activists operating inside or outside the party framework to deliberately disrupt it, such as affecting candidates' positions or placing pressure on party leaders. It was only after their electoral successes did these politicians realize their proclivities toward Tea Party policy positions, leading to a naturally occurring working relationship—not one stemming from intraparty conflict.

The purpose of my dissertation is to study intraparty conflict in state parties and explore the conditions through which party factions gain influence within state parties. As the survey of existing literature demonstrated, there is a need for research on state parties that emphasizes depth, proposes causal mechanisms, and generates hypotheses that may be tested in future research.[72] When assessing the relative dearth of knowledge of the state parties in political science, a case study research design is well-suited to address the gaps. In this dissertation, I selected eight out of the fifty state Republican parties to examine as cases. For each case, I considered the state's history of party competition, the state Republican party's prior experience with factional conflict, and any characteristics of the state that could theoretically influence the formation and strength of party factionalism. To keep track of the large changes in media, polarization, and nationalization over the past few decades, the earliest period of focus is the Christian Right era in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Using the most extreme examples of state parties as case studies would offer a good chance of noticing effects and making discoveries for the purpose of furthering the case study's goals;[73] however, political science research still struggles to fully understand even "normal" state party activity or behavior. Some state parties selected, therefore, will have fewer clear indications of party factionalism or intraparty conflict. Together, the state parties to be selected should strike a balance between being representative (i.e. typical of its kind) and being diverse for purposes of isolating causes and effects when comparing groups.[74]

The act of "measuring" any element of a given political party—much less a sub-national one—is a difficult process to operationalize, though decades of political science research have nevertheless pursed this objective. Elazar (1966) published one of the earliest attempts to categorize state political systems into some working order, by assessing each state's political culture as either "moralistic", "individualistic", or "traditional".[75] Later, Mayhew (1986) assessed the presence and strength of "traditional party organizations" (TPO) for a given state, and then assigned a score of 1 to 5 for all fifty of them.[76] A separate line of approach sought to incorporate any relevant data into a more fundamentally quantitative index. Sharkansky, for

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[72] Gerring, John. *Case study research: Principles and practices*. Cambridge University Press. 2006.
[73] Seawright, Jason. "The case for selecting cases that are deviant or extreme on the independent variable." *Sociological Methods & Research* 45, no. 3 (2016): 493-525. 2016.
[74] Gerring, John. *Case study research: Principles and practices*. Cambridge University Press. 2006.
[75] Elazar, Daniel Judah. "American federalism: A view from the states." 1966.
[76] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986.

example, transformed Elazar's categorical variable into a quantitative measure of political culture.[77] Finally, Gibson et al. (1983) remains one of the few studies to measure individual political parties within each state.[78] Through hundreds of interviews, they collected quantitative data that included headquarters capacity, staff sizes, and yearly budgets to create an index that measured the strength of the one hundred major political parties, which could be employed to compare their relative strengths and weaknesses, both between states and within them.[79]

The goal of the dissertation is to understand the conditions that may exacerbate (or attenuate) intraparty conflict. Out of fifty possible state Republican parties to study, I sought to select eight with the primary aim to represent as much variation of intraparty conflict within them. By ensuring I select cases with a variety of intraparty conflict outcomes, any underlying conditions may be more readily identified and compared between cases; for example, what conditions are present in a state party with zero history of intraparty conflict that may be absent in a state party rife with it? Thus, "measuring" intraparty conflict to conceptualize a spectrum of intraparty outcomes is the next step. I began with comprehensively researching all fifty state Republican parties and their unique histories since the Christian Right era beginning in the late 1980s. Over time, I developed a list of shared characteristics between state parties that linked to intraparty conflict in some way. This line of inquiry most resembles the work by Mayhew, who comprehensively read as much as possible about each state before assigning a ranking to each after all cases were studied—though of course, my decision to study specific state parties (not just the states holistically) also resembles Gibson et al.'s (1983) approach.[80] After eliminating some characteristics that tended to overlap too much with others, the end result was a rubric of ten characteristics.

Chair has been elected to public office before	Divided endorsements for chair election
Chair has run for public office before	Contested vote for chair (within 60-40 split)
Chair has connection to national party	Journalistic coverage of conflict/factions
Chair has prior state/county/local party background	Group displacement/exit from the party
Calls within party for leadership to resign	Conflict between state and county/local parties

Next, I went back through all of the resources collected for each state Republican party and assigned a score to all fifty parties, from 0 (no characteristics present) to 10 (all characteristics present). This included reading all relevant state-level newspaper articles from 2017 to 2024 that mention the formal name of the state's Republican party. The scores for state Republican parties from 2016 to today are below. As a small extra consideration, I color-coded each state with its Cook Political Report designation in the 2020 election to see if any patterns emerged between Republican intraparty conflict and electoral competitiveness. States in blue were solid or likely Democratic states, states in red were solid or likely Republican states, and states in black were toss-ups. Interestingly, state GOP scores seem mostly unaffected by two-

[77] Sharkansky, Ira. "The utility of Elazar's political culture: A research note." *Polity* 2, no. 1 (1969): 66-83.
[78] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986; Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.

party competitiveness in the state. Across the distribution, there are many examples of more stable and stable state parties in every context, which bodes well for comparison across state Republican parties.

Score	State Republican Party (2016-2024)
1	MI
2	ID, NC
3	NE
4	KS, MA, NV, ND, WY
5	CO, IL, LA, MN, NM, NY, OH, OR, PA, WV
6	AK, CT, DE, FL, GA, ME, MD, MT, NH, OK, TX, WA, WI
7	CA, MS, NJ, RI, SC, UT, VA
8	AL, AZ, MO, TN, VT
9	AR, HI, IN, KY, SD
10	IA

My next step was to conduct a similar scoring procedure with regard to my other two time periods of interest: the Tea Party era and the Christian Right era. However, the scoring of state Republican parties was more rudimentary in these periods than the scoring of the current era. One reason is that the uneven periods of time in the two eras could yield disproportionate amounts of information collected about each state party. This is especially true of the Christian Right, where its approximate date of emergence varies significantly depending on the state. Additionally, there was a much greater difficulty in relying on news coverage to track the activities of individual state parties in older periods. While formal state-level reporting from news outlets has been on the decline, the rise of the Internet and social media has made state party discord in the contemporary period easier to identify in the current era. For the Christian Right movement, I relied on academic journal articles and books, supplemented with any available state-level newspaper coverage that included the word stem "Christian" from 1970 to 1998, to make this judgment. For the Tea Party movement, I looked at all state-level newspaper articles from 2009 to 2015 that included the formal name of each state's Republican party and supplemented my own reading with any summary data from other sources, such as a density map of Tea Party network members by the *Christian Science Monitor* and a *New York Times* project summarizing all elections (national and state-level) involving Tea Party-endorsed candidates in 2010.

Given the lack of meaningful comparability of numerical scores across three distinct eras, I instead condensed the range of scores into a binary designation of whether each state party experienced a "high" or "low" presence of conflict from each movement for all fifty state Republican parties, then grouped all Republican parties based on their similarities across all three time periods. A table with these designations for all fifty state Republican parties is below.

Christian Right/Tea Party/Trump Supporters Intraparty Conflict	
1. Low/Low/Low (8 states)	Arkansas, Delaware, Hawaii, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia
2. Low/Low/High (12 states)	Connecticut, Louisiana, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Wyoming
3. Low/High/Low (3 states)	Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee
4. Low/High/High (6 states)	Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire
5. High/Low/Low (5 states)	Alabama, California, Mississippi, South Carolina, Washington
6. High/Low/High (3 states)	Florida, Georgia, Michigan
7. High/High/Low (3 states)	Iowa, Missouri, Virginia
8. High/High/High (10 states)	Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Wisconsin

Provided there are eight possible groupings that state parties could fall into, it felt prudent to choose eight state Republican parties– one from each group– as case studies for the dissertation. In addition to accomplishing my case study selection goal at the outset– to capture a complete range of intraparty conflict outcomes in order to maximize the chances of identifying and comparing any underlying conditions– each case study also has direct comparability with several other states when drilling down on a particular time period. For example, while each state's combination of intraparty conflict over the three eras will be unique when considered individually, I will still have four cases each of "high" and "low" intraparty conflict for each period of interest to draw any additional conclusions.

The case study selection described emphasized breadth over depth to make approximate judgments on the general presence (or absence) of a particular intraparty conflict at a particular point in time across all fifty states, cross-checking lists of preselected party characteristics as a sort of heuristic to accomplish this task. Factors like disproportionate media coverage of one event over another, however-- especially across fifty state-level media markets-- could skew my initial judgment that could only to be resolved *ex post* through proper in-depth exploration and comparison of state-specific context. Therefore, the labels used to describe case studies at the outset may not necessarily match my final assessment of them after an in-depth exploration of each case. For example, I would now judge the surprise upset of incumbent U.S. Senator Bob Bennett by the Tea Party in Utah, and the election of Tea Party figurehead Rand Paul to the Kentucky U.S. Senate seat in 2010, to be equally significant to assessing intraparty conflict for Utah and Kentucky. However, Paul's campaign had dominated state and national media coverage for months, while upset carried much less momentum in comparable media markets.

Thus, my initial judgment skewed toward Kentucky having a "High" presence and Utah having a "Low" presence of intraparty conflict during the Tea Party years for the purposes of case study selection, although my assessment on each has since been updated (as will be seen in their respective chapters). When applicable, I will note when my initial determination of a state GOP's intraparty conflict is at-odds with what I would conclude after conducting my research.

When it came to choosing one state Republican party from each category, my secondary goal was to make sure my cases were well-represented in terms of geographic region and general partisanship trends. As seen in the final table of case studies below, the list of parties used as case studies are from Utah, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Colorado, California, Michigan, Iowa, and North Carolina. Now that I had classified each state party based on its history of intraparty conflict in each time period, my work could now go as in-depth as possible to understand what conditions were present (or absent) in these state parties that may have given rise to the intraparty conflicts observed within. For a comprehensive assessment of these state parties, I utilized a variety of resources including historical journalistic coverage, archival data on the state parties, state-and local-level public opinion data, election outcomes, and in some cases personal interviews of past and present state party officials.

State Republican Party	Categorization	Region	Cook PVI
Utah Republican Party	Low/Low/Low	Mountain West	R
Republican Party of Pennsylvania	Low/Low/High	Northeast	Tossup
Republican Party of Kentucky	Low/High/Low	South	R
Colorado Republican Party	Low/High/High	Mountain West	D
California Republican Party	High/Low/Low	Western	D
Michigan Republican Party	High/Low/High	Midwest	Tossup
Republican Party of Iowa	High/High/Low	Midwest	Tossup
North Carolina Republican Party	High/High/High	South	Tossup

Exploratory Hypotheses

The overall purpose of my dissertation is to explore the conditions that exacerbate or mitigate intraparty conflict in Republican state parties. Features of state political institutions– including the parties, political organizations, and state governments– may influence the frequency and intensity of party factionalism. The Republican Party, in particular, has become a vehicle for the conservative movement, broadly organizing its party apparatus and its electorate under one cohesive ideology.[81] However, Republican party members' embrace of their conservative self-identity is a double-edged sword, helping to unite voters during elections but rendering their primaries and other party activities vulnerable to more extreme conservative positions. Given the Republican Party's long-perceived advantage in party structure and

[81] Grossmann, Matt, and David A. Hopkins. *Asymmetric politics: Ideological Republicans and group interest Democrats*. Oxford University Press. 2016.

organizational capacity,[82] successful ideological capture of Republican organizations is equally as impressive as it is puzzling.

A long-held ideal of democracy is that the people living in a state should be able to shape the state political party system they participate in, through the election of representatives or other participatory actions.[83] Political science research, however, has long debated the extent of state policymakers' responsiveness to the policy preferences of their electorate. Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) find that state policies are highly responsive to public opinion.[84] While the data used by Erikson, Wright and McIver (1993) spans a period before the legislative polarization we observe today, recent work incorporating contemporary data also reaches the same general conclusion that state policy tends to conform to the will of its people.[85] However, Grumbach (2022) warns that Republican control of state governments undermines the state's responsiveness to public opinion throughout almost all policy issue areas.[86] Furthermore, the actions of state political parties I cover continually give pause to the idea that state parties are nominating candidates with the greatest chance to be elected by the state's voters, so mass public explanations for intraparty conflict are not focused on in the dissertation.

What about institutional explanations? I propose two primary conditions of state-level institutions that may render state parties more or less vulnerable to party faction capture. The subsequent hypotheses meant to study these conditions have origins in past political science research. First, the aforementioned Mayhew (1986) recorded each state's history of traditional party organizations (TPO), which he defined as a durable organization with autonomy, hierarchy, tangible incentive structures, and the goal of nominating candidates for public office.[87] States with more TPO ties are linked to lower levels of polarization (McCarty 2015; McCarty and Shor 2016).[88] Extending the findings of these scholars to the context of the dissertation (primarily state Republican politics) means potentially accounting for a tightly interconnected web between state governments, its Republican elected officials, and the state GOP. I believe that the stronger the relationships between these groups, the less likely opportunities are present for intraparty conflict and divided party factionalism. Elements of linkages between these groups include campaign finance laws, state laws on the parties and the rules they must follow, party bylaws, and reforms meant to empower citizens in the political process, such as open primaries and ballot initiatives.

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[82] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.

[83] E.g. Federalist No. 14.

[84] Erikson, Robert S., Gerald C. Wright, and John P. McIver. *Statehouse democracy: Public opinion and policy in the American states*. Cambridge University Press. 1993.

[85] Caughey, Devin, and Christopher Warshaw. "Dynamic democracy: Public opinion, elections, and policymaking in the American States." In *Dynamic Democracy*. University of Chicago Press. 2022.

[86] Grumbach, Jacob. *Laboratories against democracy: How national parties transformed state politics*. Princeton University Press. 2022.

[87] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986.

[88] McCarty, Nolan. "Reducing polarization by making parties stronger." *Solutions to political polarization in America* (2015): 136-45. 2015; McCarty, Nolan, and Boris Shor. "Partisan polarization in the United States: Diagnoses and avenues for reform." SSRN. 2016.

State-Level Institutions Hypothesis: Strong linkages between state governments, Republican elected officials, and the state party create greater resistance to intraparty conflict than ones with weaker ties.

Next, I posit that the features of a state party may render it more or less susceptible to intraparty conflict from so-called insurgent party factions, like the Christian Right, Tea Party activists, or pro-Trump Republicans. When these groups are able to identify multiple avenues of opportunity for party takeover, such as party leadership elections or delegation selection rules, the extant state party infrastructure may be unprepared for rapid turnover or rules changes that may weaken itself further over time. In particular, I believe that the nature of party leadership elections and the methods through which national delegates to the Republican National Committee are selected offer ample incentive for groups like the Tea Party to invest resources into. Intraparty conflict may be especially overwhelming to state parties when national-level organizations, like presidential candidates' campaigns, add their own resources to the fray.

State Party Hypothesis: Features of the state party, such as leadership elections and delegate selection rules, may render the party more or less vulnerable to intraparty conflict by insurgent party factions.

Finally, the history of competition between parties in a state may also affect the resilience (or vulnerability) of a state party to intraparty conflict. Key (1964) suggests that individual party organizations will be the strongest and most cohesive in states with close electoral competition between them.[89] This implies that a Republican or Democratic party dominating a political locality may not have the opportunities for long-term organizational growth seemingly spurred by two-party competition. Applying Key's observations, I might expect that state-, county-, and local-level parties with limited party competition may be more susceptible to factional capture than ones who must routinely organize to oppose the other political party.

Party Competition Hypothesis: Traditionally monolithic state parties are more susceptible to factional capture from party factions when limited party competition exists at the state, county, or local level.

Outline of the Dissertation

Each of the next eight chapters covers one case study– a state Republican party. These state GOPs are presented in the order they were selected using the methodology for case study selection as outlined previously. This means that the case studies are roughly ordered from the lowest end of the spectrum of intraparty conflict to the very highest.

First, the Utah Republican Party and the Republican Party of Pennsylvania both represent some of the more stable state Republican parties over the past few decades. However, both have nonetheless encountered a few difficulties within their respective state party organizations. The Utah Republican Party, for example, was a consistent establishment Republican force until the primary upset of U.S. Senator Bob Bennett in 2010 at the hands of an insurgent Tea Party. The

[89] Key, V. O. (1964). Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups.

next few years of the Utah GOP's history demonstrates some of the most compelling evidence of a state party fighting back against outsider forces seeking to take it over. The Pennsylvania GOP, on the other hand, has lost its previously robust moderate Republican faction and, with it, much of the influence of its leadership committee over candidate recruitment and party primary contests.

Next, the Republican Party of Kentucky has been the epitome of party stability over the past few decades. With very few hiccups (the Tea Party success in electing Rand Paul in 2010 among them), the state party has been led by the powerful Mitch McConnell since his election as a U.S. Senator in 1984. As I show, McConnell's leadership in the state has both empowered generations of Kentucky Republicans while keeping his state party protected from the overreach of national Republican or conservative organizations. The Colorado Republican Party follows next and is one of the state parties most fraught with intraparty conflict in recent years. A combination of lax regulation of parties from the state laws of Colorado, a changing electorate, and an effort to privilege individual citizens over the parties has created a GOP left on its own and to its detriment. After Colorado, I move further west to California and cover how the California Republican Party has endured decades of electoral failure, in part due to its inextricable ties to unpopular party planks of the national Republican Party.

The next case is the Michigan Republican Party. As alluded to throughout this first chapter, the Michigan Republican Party has devolved from a powerful Republican force to one beleaguered by intraparty conflict throughout most of its recent history. Only very recently has the Michigan GOP become more stable, though at the tradeoff of handing much of its institutional independence over to the RNC. In contrast, the Republican Party of Iowa has been firmly linked to the RNC for decades since gaining its "first in the nation" status during the presidential primary season. I study how the Iowa GOP has historically been closely tied to the RNC, much like how the Iowa Democratic Party is linked to its own national equivalent. Finally, the North Carolina GOP experienced some level of intraparty conflict in all three periods of interest. Yet, the North Carolina Republican Party resembles Michigan in that it has similarly reshaped itself to conform with the national Republican Party in recent years.

In the last chapter, I provide some general patterns found throughout my case studies. As hypothesized, the relationship between the state, Republican elected officials, and the state party can either lend the party institutional stability or leave it out in the open, vulnerable to attack from outsider groups or party factions. Moreover, the actual institutional design of the state party itself matters in terms of the number of opportunities that may arise for intraparty conflict. Key among these features is how party leaders are elected– several state parties hold their elections at state conventions, which are much more easily manipulable by party factions seeking influence. Following that, I provide three broad conclusions from the dissertation work, touching upon the dual forces of nationalization and polarization, the ever-amorphous concept of the "grassroots", and how the very role of the state party has seemingly changed over the past few decades. I then finish with some closing thoughts about my recommendations for future work.

Chapter 2: Utah Republican Party

Introduction

The Utah Republican Party scored the lowest among state parties based on observed intraparty conflict at the outset, leading to its categorization as "Low" across all three of the Christian Right, Tea Party, and Trump eras. Utah's GOP was also chosen as one of two Mountain West states and for its heavy Republican advantage, to which only the Republican Party of Kentucky can compare out of the eight state parties covered in the dissertation. Indeed, national Republican movements like the Christian Right and the rise of pro-Trump Republicanism have been at best tepidly received by the Utah GOP. The Tea Party movement may have scored one of its defining victories in the state with the upset of incumbent Senator Bob Bennett in 2010, but its influence was brief, fading in subsequent elections due to the efforts of Utah Republican leaders. Overall, the Utah GOP has proven to be heavily resistant to the large, national Republican movements highlighted in the dissertation. I argue that changes to the state GOP's primary system, Utah's unique electorate, and the efforts of influential establishment Republicans contribute to a party organization whose intraparty conflict hasn't deviated beyond a battle between moderates and conservative leaders over the span of decades. Therefore, I find support for both the state-level institutions hypothesis and the state party hypothesis in the case of the Utah GOP, although support for my party competition hypothesis is more mixed.

Political parties in Utah exercise latitude in how to govern themselves; for example, each party can opt to open or close their primaries in any given election year. The state parties' greatest asset lies in their preprimary endorsement systems through nominating conventions. Incredibly, a candidate receiving a high enough majority of the convention vote can clinch the nomination outright and avoid a primary election entirely. As such, convention delegates exercise massive influence in the party relative to rank-and-file party members found in other states. Given the decades-long nonviability of the Democratic Party in Utah, criticism has been levied at the Utah GOP specifically for its nominating convention, which all but determines who becomes elected officials in statewide general elections. In addition to issues of representation (delegates constitute less than 0.2 percent of the state's population), Utah's convention process naturally promotes more extreme candidates and is more prone to voter fraud.[1] Recent changes in Utah state law, therefore, seek to undermine the convention process and make primary elections more representative. Key political actors in bringing about these changes come from influential establishment Republican groups and Republican state legislators– as opposed to within the party– in the 2010s.

Utah's electorate is dominated by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) who tend to be very conservative. As a result, Utah has been under strong Republican majority control for decades. Two-party competition in the state is infrequent; therefore, political battle lines are instead drawn within the Utah GOP. Historically, Republican candidates have fought to win the vote of a narrow band of party members at their state convention; only recently are candidates able to secure nomination through another means, via petitioning the registered Republican voters. Therefore, successful candidates in Utah over the

[1] "Utah's Caucus-Convention System." Hinckley Institute of Politics, University of Utah. September 2011.

past decade either cater directly to conservatives or win by broader statewide appeal. With little need to moderate their political stances for general elections, Republican candidates for office overlap significantly with the conservative electorate in the state.

Despite the conservative stances of Republican elected officials in the state, tension exists between them and the state Republican Party convention members who tend to be even more conservative. The disparity between the two groups peaked in 2010 with incumbent Senator Bob Bennett's convention upset in 2010. Since that time, a group of establishment Republican leaders worked independently of the Utah GOP to change state law, adding the petition option to circumvent the conservative gauntlet that is the state convention nomination. Other Republican leaders, like U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch, sought to emulate many of the techniques used by Tea Party networks in 2010 to prevent a similar upset as Bennett's. Crucial to establishment Republicans' success is the involvement of the LDS Church, who have issued several calls for its members to participate in the political system since 2010. The influx of new members helped neutralize groups like the Tea Party who might seek to influence the state party through local, grassroots efforts.

Background Information

Utah			
Utah Elections		Utah Republican Party	
Primary type	Caucus-convention, closed primary	**State party officer elections**	Elected by state convention
Presidential/state primaries	Separate events	**State party officer elections schedule**	Odd-numbered years
Presidential delegate allocation	Winner-take-all to candidate with majority vote	**State party convention cycle**	State nominating conventions (even years); state organizing conventions (odd years)
State election cycle	Presidential/ even-numbered years	**Pre-primary endorsements**	Yes (nominating conventions)

Typical for the Mountain West region, Utah is among the fastest growing states this century. Much of this growth is observed in Utah County (Provo), although many of the state's 29 counties also report positive population growth.[2] Utah stands out for being the global population center of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS): Church data estimates that around 61 percent of Utah's population identifies as LDS or Mormon.[3] While there is a decades-long LDS policy to maintain political neutrality as an institution, Mormons in the electorate identify as much more conservative, and much less liberal, than the general United

[2] Williams, Carter. "22 of Utah's 29 counties grew in 2023. Here's who topped the list". *Deseret News*. March 14, 2024.

[3] Canham, Matt. "Utah sees Latter-day Saint slowdown and membership numbers drop in Salt Lake County". *The Salt Lake Tribune*. January 5, 2020.

States population.[4] Utah's strong ties to Mormonism, whose members are predominantly white, reflect the racial composition of the state: Utah has the highest proportion of white Americans in the country, at around 90 percent.[5] Finally, the ubiquity of conservative-leaning LDS members throughout the state translates to a significant Republican edge in voter registration. As of December 2024, about 52.5 percent of active voters (i.e. a registered voter who has voted in at least one of the last two general elections) are registered Republicans, compared to 13.7 percent for Democrats and 27.2 percent for unaffiliated voters.[6] In contrast to national trends, Utah has experienced a precipitous decline in unaffiliated voters. It is likely that the Utah Republican Party's closed primary, as well as Republicans' hold on elected offices in the state, incentivizes voters to register as Republican because doing otherwise would effectively bar themselves from participating in elections.[7]

Barring a few periods of Democratic control in the first half of the 20th century, Utah has been under consistent Republican control since being added as a state in 1896. In recent decades, the highwater mark for the Democratic Party was when Democrats Cal Rampton and Scott Matheson controlled the governorship for twenty consecutive years until 1984, but unified Republican control of the state has been uninterrupted since then. From 2014 to 2016 Utah's state legislature reached its most lopsided majority, with Republicans outnumbering Democrats 63 members to 12 in the state house and 24 to 5 in the state senate. Given the lack of seats changing parties between elections, any changes to the ideological balance in Utah's elected officials necessarily originates from within each of the two parties, not between them. Shor and McCarty's (2022) measures of state legislative polarization support this claim: despite the lack of two-party competition, legislators from both parties exhibit more extreme ideological positions over time.[8] The handful of elected Utah Democrats, in particular, shifted to the ideological left more so than Democratic legislators in most other states.[9]

Despite a high conservative baseline of Republican elected officials, conflicts arise between candidates and the more extreme delegates at the state party's nominating conventions. Examples are seen in Utah's delegation to the House of Representatives over the past several election cycles. For instance, 3rd House District Representative Chris Cannon staked out a reputation as one of the chamber's most conservative members. Despite this, Cannon faced primary opposition from his right almost every year since his first term began in 1997 and eventually lost the primary to Jason Chaffetz– a fan favorite of the nominating convention– in 2008. More recently, longtime incumbent Republican Rob Bishop chose not to seek reelection for the 1st House district in 2020. Blake Moore, a moderate Republican, succeeded Bishop– but only after being pitted against eleven other (mostly more conservative) Republican candidates at the convention. In both 2020 and 2022, Moore lost the at the state nominating convention yet easily won the primary and general election.

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[4] "A Portrait of Mormons in the U.S.". *Pew Research Center*. July 24, 2009.

[5] U.S. Census Bureau Data.

[6] Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Utah.

[7] Schott, Bryan. "Utah House narrowly approves bill to limit when voters can switch parties - The measure blocks voters from changing party affiliation right before a primary election." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, February 12, 2021.

[8] Shor, Boris and Nolan McCarty. Two decades of polarization in American state legislatures. *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy*, *3*(3–4), 343-370. 2022.

[9] Ibid.

Past political science research used to describe Utah's political system and parties are all in agreement on the same basic characterization. Elazar categorized Utah's political culture as "moralistic", signifying greater political participation from citizens and a desire to improve the general welfare of the public from its elected officials.[10] Utah's youth as a state likely owes to this sort of idealistic line of thinking, though Mayhew (1986) scores the state a 1 out of 5 on his TPO scale for this same reason: Utah lacks the centuries of political institutional development found in other states that would have naturally developed with time.[11] Gibson et al. (1983), on the other hand, clashes the most with how the state political system of Utah is perceived today, due to the relatively competitive Utah Democratic Party of the 1970s (when the authors were collecting their data).[12] While Gibson et al. (1983) ranks both of Utah's parties as below average out of the total pool of one hundred state parties, they assign a higher party strength index to the Utah Democratic Party than to their Republican counterpart.[13] More recent work penalizes Utah's political system for being unrepresentative and difficult to participate in for non-Republican citizens, mostly as a consequence of Utah's overly partisan state primary system.[14]

Election and primary laws

The foundation of Utah's primary system goes back to the state's creation and has deviated very little since. Aside from a ten-year stint of direct primaries in the 1930s and 1940s, Utah is unique for its pre-primary convention system that it continues to administer to this day. The 1990s brought fundamental changes to party composition. In 1993, the Utah state legislature moved the state's primary elections up from September to June. By doing so, the distribution of money moved away from the parties and toward individual candidates.[15] In 1994, the state legislature mandated state parties to procure their own bylaws and constitutions to run themselves more independently from the state, setting the stage for the two major parties to diverge in the following decades. For example, Utah Republicans closed their primary election in 2002, while Utah Democrats opt to keep theirs open to unaffiliated voters.

As mentioned, Utah Republicans have always voted to close off their primary to any voter not registered as a Republican. Utah Democrats offer a semi-closed primary, allowing unaffiliated voters to participate in their primary elections. In both parties, however, primary conventions provide another layer in which party loyalists are able to influence the slate of candidates seeking their party's nomination. Held in May of a presidential election year, the conventions allow its attendees to determine who appears on Utah's primary ballot in June. The voting members of the conventions are composed of all county and state delegates, elected in precinct caucuses held in March.

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[10] Elazar, Daniel Judah. "American federalism: A view from the states." 1966.
[11] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986.
[12] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.
[13] Ibid.
[14] E.g. Stewart III, Charles. "The elections performance index: past, present, and future." In *The future of election administration*, pp. 119-153. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019.
[15] Benedict, Robert C. "Utah". In *State party profiles: a 50-state guide to development, organization, and resources*. (1997).

Two primary rules concerning the convention have spurred frequent debate among state Republican leaders. First, candidates who win 60 percent or more of the convention vote on the first pass automatically clinch their party's nomination without the need for a primary. The original intent of such a rule was to benefit incumbents or otherwise popular candidates, who may avoid spending costly time and resources campaigning for weeks before the primary election. Second, a petition option was added in 2014 that allows a candidate to avoid the state convention altogether. If candidates collect signatures by at least 2 percent of their party's registered members who reside in the jurisdiction of the office sought, they are automatically added to the primary election ballot without requiring state convention participation. The petition has become increasingly relied upon by establishment Republicans seeking office, but not without generating controversy within the party.[16]

Utah has procedures for both legislatively-referred and citizen-initiated ballot propositions. No propositions have passed that affect extant Utah election law, although the threat of adding a ballot proposition has been employed by state party members as a bargaining tactic in the past. For example, the Count My Vote initiative threatened to eliminate the caucus system in favor of a direct primary. Republican legislators, fearing retribution by the delegates who elected them, compromised by adding the petition process in 2014 as an alternate means of seeking the primary nomination.[17] Other initiatives have been undertaken but failed to make it to ballot, such as a proposition that would enact term limits on state legislators. As it stands today, there are no term limits on any statewide position, including governors.

Finally, Utah's campaign finance laws are extremely lax. This includes no contribution limits by individuals, state parties, PACs, or corporations. Alabama, Oregon, Nebraska, and Virginia are the only other states with similarly unlimited contribution limits.[18] Utah also ranks near the bottom in terms of campaign finance transparency and state governmental oversight.[19] The campaign finance landscape of Utah, therefore, grants massive influence to the state party fundraising apparatus. In recent years, however, the Utah GOP encountered issues involving an individual donor's contributions that shifted influence within the party to the donor, which will be discussed in further detail.

Party rules and bylaws

Static features

Both major political parties in Utah are subject to the Utah Code. Stipulations include requiring parties to draft a party constitution and bylaws, complete with an organizational structure, membership requirements, a schedule of meetings and conventions, filling vacancies, and allocating state delegates to the national convention. The Utah Code also includes the option

[16] Evensen, Jay. "A fight Utah's GOP leaders should abandon." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, September 13, 2017.

[17] Rolly, Paul. "Rolly: GOP's anti-Count My Vote efforts in death throes." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, February 20, 2015.

[18] "State Limits on Contributions to Candidates". *National Conference of State Legislatures*. May 2023.

[19] "The State Campaign Finance Index 2022". *Coalition for Integrity*. 2022.

for parties to close their primary elections and lays out the petition process for candidates to avoid their party's convention.

The neighborhood caucus represents the basic building block of the party. Held at the precinct level in even years, the caucus determines precinct leadership and their delegate(s) to the county convention and to the state convention. The exact number of delegates from each precinct is determined by the county party on the basis of "relative Republican strength", defined as the percentage breakdown of the total votes cast in the previous election for governor, attorney general, state auditor, and state treasurer. The combination of a powerful state convention voting body with relatively low attendance at precinct caucuses can make the precinct-level election of state convention delegates incredibly significant for the "grassroots" members of the party.

Convention votes determine a large amount of party business. County conventions elect state delegates, but may also directly appoint any unfilled precinct-elected delegate slots. It is at state conventions where party resolutions and amendments are voted upon and ratified. State officer elections– chair, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer– are also held at the convention. Finally, conventions exercise significant authority in voting on primary candidates. This ability to gatekeep candidates has declined in recent elections, however, with candidates increasingly utilizing the aforementioned petition option to avoid contentious convention voting.

The state central committee is the "governing and policy-making" body of the party, and has around 200 members. The votes cast at the convention, however, explicitly outrank those of the state central committee. For example, either the state central committee or the state convention may amend a party bylaw with two-thirds of their membership's vote, but any changes approved by the state central committee must always be ratified by the state convention. Membership of the state central committee includes party officers, the chair and vice chair of each county-level Republican party, Republican statewide elected officials, and the chairs of party auxiliaries like College Republicans or multicultural Republican organizations. The central committee confirms any appointments the chair makes, and also appoints the members of the constitution/bylaws committee and the audit committee.

In contrast to the structures of other state parties, which treat their central and executive committees as roughly equal in authority, the Utah GOP's executive committee is defined as a standing committee of the state central committee. Membership in the executive committee includes the state party officers and two representatives from each congressional district who are elected by their respective district's party. The executive committee has two roles per the party bylaws. First, it advises the state central committee and the officers of the party. Any party committee member or officer may submit a proposal to the executive committee for review and recommendation before submitting the proposal to the wider state central committee. Second, the executive committee reviews auxiliary status to organizations petitioning to work alongside the state party. Overall, the state executive committee exercises little influence in the party, despite a more exclusive membership and meeting more often than the state central committee (monthly versus quarterly).

The state chair of the party serves as the chair of the state central committee and the state executive committee. The chair also appoints all party personnel and the members of the budget and convention committees, subject to approval by the state central committee. Finally, the chair is the designated liaison to the lieutenant governor, whose office oversees all elections and party activity in the state.

In conclusion, the party structure of the Utah Republican Party is heavily centralized toward the convention and its delegates. The descriptions of the three formal bodies in party

bylaws are all sparse. The chair's formal duties are either symbolic or checked by the state central committee; the executive committee serves the central committee in an advisory role; and the central committee is unable to enact any policy unilaterally (requiring ratification by convention vote). The relatively short length of both the bylaws and the constitution leave substantial room for wide interpretability, with particular regard to how party decisions are both made and enacted.

Dynamic features

Relative to most other Republican state parties in this dissertation, the Utah Republican Party's governing documents– its constitution and its party bylaws– are updated far less. When changes are made, however, they are usually meaningful for the relative balance of power within the party structure. I located eight distinct copies of the party bylaws from 1999 to 2024 and four copies of the party's constitution from 2008 to 2021. Despite Utah state law requiring state parties to create a specialized constitution and bylaws, parties are not required to submit them to the state for oversight, and the state does not retain any copies for recordkeeping.

The first few updated versions of the bylaws introduced rules that came to define the Utah GOP today. For example, 2001 added multiple ballots and preference voting to their convention elections. In 2005, the power of the executive committee to review auxiliary organizations was defined, detailed procedures for filling legislative vacancies were laid out, and a section on party neutrality was added that prohibited officers and staff from publicly endorsing or opposing any Republican candidate while multiple Republicans contested the same office. Finally, 2007 formally required all voters participating in the presidential primary to be registered Republicans, even though the Utah GOP had been closing its primary to unaffiliated voters since 2002 per its party constitution. 2007's bylaws also provided detailed guidelines for planning conventions and establishing an agenda to conduct business efficiently there.

Other changes made during this time indicate intraparty disputes between the levels of the party structure. For example, 2002 added a supremacy provision that established the state Republican party as the eminent governing body and declared all inconsistent county and precinct caucus rules to be null and void. In 2005's version of the bylaws, however, this provision was removed entirely– an indication that grassroots members held sway in the party years before the Tea Party. Another recurring battle involves identifying who may propose amendments to the party. In 2005, language was added explicitly allowing any delegate to move an amendment to convention business. Later that year, the party reversed this ruling and established that only members of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee were able to permit or disallow amendment proposals.

The 2009 bylaws made it marginally more difficult to amend the state party platform and resolutions, requiring five delegate endorsements for the proposed amendment to be considered. The next published version of the bylaws, written in 2013, added a transparency measure for the state central committee, allowing individual votes by members to be publicly disclosed. Language was also added allowing presidential candidates to unbind any Utah delegates they won in the primary election. Previously, Utah delegates were bound to the candidate through the first ballot at the RNC, even if that candidate wasn't in the running anymore.

The largest change in 2013 added detailed instructions for conducting caucus meetings. In prior versions of the bylaws, the agenda of caucus meetings consisted of a prayer, the pledge of allegiance, and the reading of the state or county party platform. New additions to the agenda

include a review of rules, procedures, and duties of officer positions; then, nominations and elections of precinct officers and delegates would be conducted.

The majority of all changes to the Utah bylaws occurred in the ten years between 2013 and 2023. Within this period, it is known that multiple versions of the bylaws have been published, yet it is impossible to determine the exact year rules were passed due to the current availability of bylaws data. One of the predominant themes of the changes takes away authority from the chair. For example, the chair used to be able to fill all vacancies in the party, and now may only do so on positions they were allowed to appoint in the first place. The same goes for power structure: those appointed by the state central committee are now explicitly serving at the discretion of the committee, instead of all appointees serving at the discretion of the chair. The party chair formally serves as the liaison to the Lieutenant Governor's office, but in 2023 language was added that the chair is now subject to the directives of the state central committee in this capacity. Finally, a special rule was added giving the option for party officers to be removed "for cause", and clarifies that officers can be removed by the assembly. These changes were most likely added during party chair Rob Anderson's tenure beginning in 2017: Anderson fought frequently with the state central committee, so the committee may have taken steps to limit the chair's authority in this period.

As I will discuss, the establishment wing of the party rebounded somewhat in the late 2010s. In the wake of controversially held party meetings, quorum requirements changed from 40 voting members of the state central committee to a majority of voting members. Given that in 2024 there were 178 members of the state central committee, the quorum requirement is now over double what it was previously. Additionally, in 2023 agenda items needed to be submitted one month prior by a member of the state central committee member desiring to do so (in 2013, agenda items needed to be submitted one week prior to the meeting). Officers and members of elected committees are exempt from this deadline, and the chair is given the discretion to approve any agenda item or written materials if it is submitted past the deadline. Finally, state central committee meetings are now capped at four hours in length.

As previously mentioned, primary candidates are able to avoid the party convention by means of a petition process. The state party, ran by staunch conservatives at the time and threatened by this loss of their influence on the Republican primary, considered the candidates avoiding the convention as disloyal to the party and targeted them heavily in their 2023 bylaws. The state GOP heavily altered Republican neutrality requirements: party officers, national committee members, and paid staff are able to deny assistance and access to party services to candidates who advance to the primary election by skipping the party convention. When convention-nominated candidates oppose petition-nominated candidates in the party primary, party officers, national committee members, and paid staff shall offer "active and equitable support" to convention-nominated candidates and "shall not support or provide information, services, or other resources" to petition-nominated candidates. Finally, all primary candidates must provide an itemized list of their exceptions to the party platform to be published "prominently" on the state party's website.

The Utah GOP's constitution has been even less altered than its bylaws. Changes made from 2008 to 2011 include fixing the date of precinct caucuses further in advance and establishing a higher standard of quality for lists of state delegates. Interestingly, the way that candidates are elected in state and county nominating conventions changed. Under the old constitution, races with more than three candidates would be reduced to the top three on the first ballot; in the new version, candidates were to be eliminated one at a time. There has been no

discourse on these changes, but I believe they represent efforts by the state party to bolster their defenses against "grassroots" insurgencies in the wake of the 2010 state convention. For example, if the party establishment believes that they remain in majority control of the state convention, then the revised method of elections (eliminating one candidate at a time) serves to prolong the voting process significantly and gives more opportunities for extreme candidates to be knocked off the ballot.

Intraparty Conflicts in the Utah State Republican Party

Christian-affiliated groups in the Utah Republican Party

Historically, Utah's abortion laws were some of the most restrictive in the country. The state fought against *Roe v. Wade* in the weeks and months following the ruling.[20] Later, Utah passed the Criminal Abortion Act in 1991, which was considered to be the strictest anti-abortion legislation in the country.[21] Finally, nearly the entire Republican congressional delegation from Utah received perfect or near-perfect scorecards from conservative groups like Christian Voice.[22] Therefore, if Christian organizations sought to spend resources in places to enact anti-abortion policies, Utah would be near the bottom of the list.

Socially conservative groups were present in Utah in the 1990s, and described as exercising "influence beyond their numbers".[23] Utah had small but active chapters of Eagle Forum and some Christian-affiliated groups: Eagle Forum, the largest of these groups, claimed a membership of hundreds of members in 1993.[24] The Utah Republican Assembly, another staunchly conservative group, emerged in state Republican circles a few years later in 1997, although their presence was even smaller: their annual convention attracted roughly 150 attendees from across the state in 1999.[25] It is likely not a coincidence that the leader of Eagle Forum and the leader of the Republican Assembly were married couple Gayle and Don Ruzicka.[26] The two leaders often worked together to promote anti-abortion causes, although the actual organizations they led prioritized many other issues aside from abortion.

Despite the presence of these socially conservative groups, I find no evidence of them achieving electoral success within the state GOP. While the Eagle Forum was linked to several

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[20] Olander, Daedan. "A timeline of Utah's history with abortion rights and Roe v. Wade - Historically, Utah has passed some of the strictest laws regulating abortion in the nation and more could come into effect if Roe v. Wade is overturned this summer." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 6, 2022.

[21] Lewin, Tamar. "Strict Anti-Abortion Law Signed in Utah". *The New York Times*. January 26, 1991.

[22] Snelgrove, Richard. "Owens Gets Low Rating From Groups." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, April 16, 1990: A7.

[23] Benedict, Robert C. "Utah". In *State party profiles: a 50-state guide to development, organization, and resources*. (1997).

[24] Autman, Samuel A. "Political watchdog groups keeping an eagle eye on Utah education issues - S.L. forum members say principal's planned curriculum doesn't fly." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, July 19, 1993: D1.

[25] Dillon, Lucinda. "GOP not conservative enough, Ruzicka says." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, March 14, 1999: B02.

[26] Rolly, Paul. "Utah's Dominant Republicans Have Their Own Internal Concerns." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, April 19, 1998: AA3.

candidates challenging state legislative Republican incumbents in 1996, none managed to win the primary convention, and one incumbent supported by the Eagle Forum even lost to a moderate Republican.[27] In national politics, the Eagle Forum led the charge in the state for Pat Buchanan during the Republican presidential primary.[28] Since Bob Dole had essentially clinched the nomination by the time of the mass meetings in late March, however, the effort to gather Buchanan supporters within the state party quickly dissipated.

In 1998, *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported that the conservative Utah Republican Assembly offered support or endorsements in sixteen primary races in the 1998 primaries, losing twelve and winning four of them.[29] However, none of the four victories affected larger offices or made waves within the state party. For example, a county commissioner was endorsed by the Republican Assembly on the night before the primary, which drew no public attention.[30] On the other hand, Republican Governor Mike Leavitt endorsed and financially supported four moderate candidates in the last days before the primary election, spurring calls from archconservatives that Leavitt violated party rules involving pre-primary endorsements.[31] At the behest of some conservatives, the state GOP conducted a review of the situation– although no action was taken against Leavitt nor were changes made to party rules.[32]

The largest "victory" that social conservatives can claim is their representation on state and national Republican delegations. The combination of sparse attendance at neighborhood caucuses and caucuses' feature of directly electing delegates to the state convention enabled smaller, motivated groups to easily capture delegate slots.[33] Gayle and Don Ruzicka embraced this strategy, recruiting Eagle Forum and, later, Utah Republican Assembly members to attend neighborhood caucuses and promote their own candidates as delegates; in one case in 1996, five members of the Ruzicka family were named delegates or alternates to the state convention.[34] The chief aim of electing preferred delegates was not to nominate or elect like-minded candidates, however, but to keep up anti-abortion discourse in both the state and national Republican party platforms.[35] An outsized number of delegate slots were held by the vocal minority, but even the social conservative leaders' positions were tenuously held. Gayle Ruzicka, for example, lost the

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[27] Collins, Lois M. and Jim Rayburn. "5 Of 6 Incumbents in the House Easily Clear Primary Hurdle." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, June 26, 1996: A11; Semerad, Tony. "Bountiful Voters Shift to the Center, Toss Out Incumbent Right-Winger - Incumbent Loses In Primary Runoff." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, June 27, 1996.

[28] Rolly, Paul. "The Rolly Report." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, February 25, 1996: A2.

[29] Bernick Jr., Bob. "Moderates foil primary challengers." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, June 24, 1998: A1.

[30] Rolly, Paul. "Democrats Crossed Over in GOP Primary and Helped Callaghan." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, July 12, 1998: AA3.

[31] Harrie, Dan and Judy Fahys. "Losers of Primary: The Governor `Betrayed' Us; They say Leavitt used last-minute dirty tactics to tarnish their name, make them look like wackos; Primary: Losers Say Leavitt Betrayed Them." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, June 25, 1998: B1.

[32] Harrie, Dan. "GOP Could Ban Pre-Primary Candidate Endorsements by Officials." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, August 8, 1998: B2.

[33] Fahys, Judy. "It May Rule, But Utah GOP Lacks Unity; Differences Just Represent Healthy Debate, Say Some; Utah GOP May Rule in State But Lack Unity." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 25, 1997: B1.

[34] Harrie, Dan. "Utah's `Delegate' Family Touts Anti-Abortion Hard Line." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, August 13, 1996: A4.

[35] Harrie, Dan. "Utah Delegates Hope GOP Ticket Gets Lift It Needs; Utah Delegates: California, Here We Come." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, August 11, 1996: A1.

position in 1998 to a more moderate candidate who brought her daughter, her daughter's friends, and a handful of teachers to secure the delegate spot.[36]

To summarize, when the division in the national Republican Party fell along evangelical ideals, the religiously homogeneous Utah Republican Party was largely unaffected. Throughout the 1990s, Utah Republicans were staunchly pro-life up and down all levels of government. The groups present (Eagle Forum and the Utah Republican Assembly) took opposition to a few Republican elected officials. The candidates procured to run against them, however, were rendered unviable by running to the right of incumbents who were already stalwart conservatives. Therefore, the roles of such groups were mostly as watchdogs to make sure that the Utah GOP remained sufficiently pro-life and socially conservative. Even so, these groups were not explicitly linked to evangelical Christians, but in adherence to a socially conservative agenda that included anti-abortion policies.

The Tea Party's success over Bennett within the Utah Republican Party

The largest case of Tea Party influence in the state was seen with the 2010 Senate Republican primary election. Incumbent Senator Bob Bennett placed third at the state convention, rendering him ineligible to be placed on the primary ballot and thus removing any possibility of reelection. Bennett had endorsements from conservatives like Orrin Hatch and Newt Gingrich, but newcomer Mike Lee received the support of even more conservative groups like FreedomWorks, 9/12 groups, and the Tea Party network in Utah. In spite of this support, Lee still only placed second at the convention and later won in a close primary race over businessman Tim Bridgewater, who had absorbed much of the establishment support that would otherwise have gone to Bennett. Aside from Lee, the convention also resulted in two upsets of Utah state house incumbents whose successes were attributed to Tea Party support.

Prior to Bennett's surprise upset, the vocal minority of arch-conservative groups remained in the party throughout the 2000s. In 2002, the state party's central committee voted to continue allowing county parties to choose how their own delegates are selected (by election or by appointment).[37] A bylaw also passed to permit a single ballot to be used in caucus meetings instead of multiple, iterative ballots that eliminate candidates one, or few, at a time.[38] The conservative wing interpreted these changes as a "hijacking" of the party, since future delegates could be "packed" by elected officials and loyalists appointed by county party leaders instead of through direct election.[39]

Moderate Lieutenant Governor Olene Walker assumed Leavitt's remaining term as governor when Leavitt left to join the Bush administration in 2003. Running for governor in 2004, Walker was unable to secure a top two finish in convention votes and thus knocked out of contention. In 2005, the six-member Constitution and Bylaws Committee ruled that only they can pass along recommended changes for the state convention delegates to vote on, angering those outside the party establishment who previously could try to enact changes to the party from

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[36] Bernick Jr., Bob. "GOP conservative outflanked." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, April 6, 1998: B1.

[37] Arave, Lynn. "GOP state meeting keeps delegates busy, doing little - Some bylaws passed, but only after a ruckus." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, March 10, 2002: B05.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Bernick Jr., Bob. "Group aims to fix 'hijacking' of GOP." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, March 13, 2002: A09.

the convention floor.[40] The back-and-forth between incensed grassroots members of the party seeking the ability to enact party changes, and the six-member Constitution and Bylaws Committee (with the backing of the party leadership) blocking any such proposals, became a recurring fight within the party.[41]

Signs of anti-establishment force emerged weeks before the 2010 state nominating convention. Establishment state party chair Dave Hansen reported that only about one in five delegates from the 2008 election cycle were re-elected in 2010.[42] Put another way, up to 80 percent of the estimated 3,500 delegates to the state convention could be newcomers to the party. Hansen states that roughly half of delegates are reelected in subsequent conventions in normal election years, resulting in over one thousand previously unaccounted for delegates.[43] Hansen mentions that "groups out there like the Tea Party and the 9/12…have been preparing for caucuses literally for months",[44] resulting in caucus turnout more than double that of 2008.[45]

At the state convention, Senator Bennett secured 885 delegates on the first ballot. After 632 delegates became available after the first ballot results, Bennett gained only twenty additional delegate votes and was knocked off from the possibility of reelection. Crucially, the two candidates most affiliated with the Tea Party in the nominating convention ballot were not the direct cause of Bennett's downfall. The candidacy of businessman and longtime Republican activist Tim Bridgewater attempted to appeal to a similar voter base to that of Bennett, and Bridgewater placed first in convention votes.[46] Bridgewater was a huge donor to the Bush campaign in 2000, ran for Utah's 2nd congressional district House seat in 2002 and 2004, and had previously served as the Utah County GOP chair and as an advisor in Governor Jon Huntsman's administration.[47]

Bridgewater had announced his campaign for Bennett's seat in May of 2009.[48] Mike Lee, the Tea Party's closest ally among the Senate candidates, declared his candidacy in January 2010.[49] Despite Lee receiving early support from FreedomWorks,[50] Bridgewater nonetheless almost won enough of the convention vote to clinch the nomination outright– falling short of the 60% threshold by less than 90 votes. Six weeks later, Lee went on to win the party primary over Bridgewater by a 51-49 percent margin. Lee benefitted from national Tea Party leaders, like Jim

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[40] Rolly, Paul. "Republican moderates rule the roost after flirting with the fringes." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, August 21, 2005: AA4.

[41] Bernick Jr., Bob. "GOP officials battle over control of party." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, May 10, 2006: A01.

[42] Davidson, Lee. "Only 1 in 5 GOP delegates re-elected — bad omen for Sen. Bob Bennett?" *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, April 1, 2010: A01.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Gehrke, Robert. "Huntsman says open primary could be way to engage." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 6, 2010.

[46] Robert Gehrke. "Bennett out; GOP delegates reject 18-year Senate veteran." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 8, 2010.

[47] Gehrke, Robert. "Bridgewater touts business background." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 4, 2010.

[48] Roche, Lisa Riley. "Bridgewater to challenge Bennett for Senate seat." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, May 12, 2009: A01.

[49] Davidson, Lee. "Lee joins the race for Senate." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, January 6, 2010: B01.

[50] Davidson, Lee. "Conservative group endorses Mike Lee for Senate." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, February 20, 2010: B03.

DeMint and Rick Santorum, becoming involved in Lee's primary campaign after the tumultuous state convention.[51]

Bennett drew the lion's share of attention from Tea Party and 912 groups, but lingering Tea Party sentiment affected some of Utah's other primary elections in 2010. Key to downstream Tea Party success was the Patrick Henry Caucus in the Utah House. Founded in 2009 by arch-conservatives,[52] the Caucus quickly collaborated with Tea Party groups to pit candidates against moderate incumbent Republicans in several primary elections.[53] Results of these efforts were mixed. Four conservative state legislative candidates endorsed by the Patrick Henry Caucus lost in the convention. State representative Mel Brown almost lost outright at the nominating convention but rallied to win the actual primary against his Tea Party challenger.[54] Finally, incumbent mainstream state representatives Steven Mascaro and Ben Ferry lost their reelection bids at the state convention. The Republican tide of 2010 ultimately led to a change in the Speakership of the state house with the support of the Patrick Henry Caucus and the Tea Party. Winning by a 30 to 28 vote over the incumbent moderate Speaker, incoming Speaker Rebecca Lockhart's largest appeal to Patrick Henry Caucus and Tea Party groups alike was her promise to decentralize the speaker's power and allow for input from multiple factions.[55]

In the wake of Bennett's convention failure, some of the Utah GOP's establishment elite met to strategize retaining control of the state party. Informally calling themselves the Mainstream Conservative Coalition, members included past state party chairs, former governors, and former legislative leaders.[56] These members, and other establishment Republicans, employed various strategies with the purpose of stemming the tide of the Tea Party movement– and the broader arch-conservative wing of the party– in future elections.

The most significant effort immediately neutralized the greatest strength of the Tea Party– its presence in neighborhood caucuses. The LDS Church First Presidency began to read letters on the pulpit for weeks before the neighborhood caucuses, calling on its members to participate in the political process.[57] The LDS Church also prohibited any church meetings to be conducted on the nights of the neighborhood caucuses.[58] The LDS Church rarely discusses politics publicly, so any underlying reason for the Church's involvement is speculative. One potential explanation is that the relationships between the LDS Church and establishment, mainstream Republicans were closely linked. For example, Bennett was related to several LDS Church leaders tracing all the way back to the establishment of the church in Utah in the 19th century.[59] In contrast, upstart, nationally focused Tea Party groups would lack the history or relationships to be able to tap into LDS resources.

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[51] Gehrke, Robert. "The Republican Senate battle ahead." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 16, 2010.

[52] Morrill, Jenn. "Utah representatives fight for states' rights, inspires other lawmakers to do the same." *Salt Lake City Examiner (UT)*, October 5, 2009.

[53] Rolly, Paul. "Rolly: Patrick Henry Caucus flames out." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, June 24, 2010.

[54] Parkinson, Patrick. "Incumbent throttles his opponent in Summit County." *Park Record (Park City, UT)*, June 25, 2010.

[55] "Our View: Utah's woman speaker." *Standard-Examiner (Ogden, UT)*, November 15, 2010.

[56] Mortensen, Ronald. "RINO's organize to reclaim control of the Utah Republican Party." *Salt Lake City Examiner (UT)*, August 22, 2010.

[57] Davidson, Lee. "Utah caucuses attracting extra attention this year." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, March 14, 2012.

[58] "The 2012 Utah Priorities Survey of Party Delegates and Voters". *Utah Foundation*. April 2012.

[59] Romero, McKenzie, Ben Lockhart, and Dave Cawley. "Robert F. Bennett, former three-term U.S. senator from Utah, dies at age 82". *Deseret News*. May 4, 2016.

The influx of Mormon voters into the party structure in 2012 appeared pivotal: party chair Thomas Wright estimated caucus participation to be double or triple what it was in 2010,[60] heavily diluting any influence that Tea Party groups could have wielded. A Utah Foundation report showed that Mormons made up 92 percent of the Republican delegates in 2012, up from 78 percent in 2010.[61] As a result of the initiative, 87 percent of the delegates elected in the 2012 caucuses were not delegates in 2010.[62] It is unclear whether the LDS Church effort was coordinated with Republican party leaders or elected officials; however, the messaging was nonpartisan and stated that the political process is best served by a "broad representation" of Utah citizens.[63]

As the largest potential target of a primary upset, Senator Orrin Hatch went beyond his contemporaries by not only attracting a wider base to the caucuses, but by catering to the Tea Party as a secondary objective. Up for reelection in 2012, Hatch seemed determined to act quickly: two weeks after the 2010 election, Hatch attended a conservative group's forum and spoke highly of the Tea Party movement.[64] He distanced himself from Bennett and stated regret for voting in favor of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), a vote that played a large part in Bennett's downfall at the hands of the Tea Party.[65] Hatch's reelection campaign also hired Tea Party leaders, lobbied to convince national groups like Club for Growth that Hatch was not their rival, and was quick to outspend the campaigns of his opposition by millions of dollars.[66]

The efforts to neutralize the Tea Party were rewarded. Hatch was forced to the Republican primary ballot for the first time in his career, but secured 57 percent of the vote at the state convention with minimal Tea Party opposition. In fact, Hatch secured endorsements from a cofounder of the Tea Party Express (though no endorsement from the organization itself).[67] Hatch scored highly among conservative rating groups in 2011 and 2012, but any effect that the Tea Party had on his ideology appeared to fade quickly after he won his primary.[68] In addition to reelecting Hatch, Utah Republican voters overwhelmingly supported moderate candidates over arch-conservative or Tea Party-supported ones across the 2012 election cycle.[69] In 2012, the strategy of flooding the state party's delegation with new members from the LDS Church appeared to blunt any Tea Party impact at the state convention, and the Tea Party hasn't been an appreciable part of the state GOP since.

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[60] Davidson, Lee. "Flood of new GOP delegates may be good for Hatch." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, March 24, 2012.

[61] Davidson, Lee. "Poll: Utah GOP delegates more moderate than two years ago." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, April 19, 2012.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Davidson, Lee. "Utah caucuses attracting extra attention this year." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, March 14, 2012.

[64] Hamburger, Jay. "I'm not another Bob Bennett, Hatch declares in Summit County." *Park Record (Park City, UT)*, November 16, 2010.

[65] Burr, Thomas. "Amid jeers, Hatch apologizes for TARP vote." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, February 11, 2011.

[66] Canham, Matt. "Once beleaguered Hatch now has upper hand." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, April 25, 2012.

[67] "FreedomWorks urges Hatch to retire, targets Utah GOP convention." *Salt Lake City Examiner (UT)*, June 17, 2011.

[68] E.g. American Conservative Union, Heritage Action for America

[69] Davidson, Lee. "Conservative lawmaker Wright faces primary challenge from moderate." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, June 12, 2012.

Utah Republican Party keeps Trump Republicanism at arm's length

Donald Trump gained next to no ground in Utah during his presidential primary campaign. In fact, Utah rewarded Senator Ted Cruz with his most decisive victory across all primary contests. Even after Trump's successful election in 2016, Utah Republicans have remained indifferent toward Trump. However, it is during this period that the relationships between the state GOP, elected officials, and Utah Republicans in the electorate fractured. In this section, I briefly cover the extent of Trump's rise to the presidency in Utah before diving into the underlying intraparty conflict that has plagued the Utah Republican Party to this day.

In Utah, the state GOP voted to decide their 2016 Republican presidential candidate by adding a presidential vote to their neighborhood caucuses.[70] Mitt Romney had complained about this decision to state Republicans in 2015, arguing that tens of thousands of primary voters would be unable to participate by the switch to a presidential caucus.[71] In 2016, Romney tried building primary opposition to the momentum sustained by Donald Trump. Romney, moderate Governor Gary Herbert, and Romney's son were on the ground in Utah encouraging caucus participation and voting against Trump.[72] Romney even abandoned John Kasich, who he had been campaigning for days prior, to unite voters around Cruz, who by that point was the candidate with the most conservative credentials.[73]

Despite Trump winning the RNC nomination weeks later, Romney and the "never Trump" contingent of the GOP were at least victorious in Utah. The state party reported record caucus attendance of around 200,000 (although this fell far short of normal presidential primary voter participation), and Cruz dominated the caucus with almost 70 percent of the vote.[74] Utah's Republican opposition to Donald Trump continued at the RNC and beyond. First, several Republican leaders in Utah– including aforementioned longtime archconservative Eagle Forum president Gayle Ruzicka– were part of the "Free The Delegates" movement at the Republican National Convention meant to deny Trump the nomination.[75] Second, moderate Utah native Evan McMullin opted to run as an alternative to Trump once Trump had secured the Republican nomination.[76] Nationally, McMullin gained less than one percent of the vote; however, he secured over twenty percent of the popular vote in Utah, an indication of Utah voters' reluctance toward Trump. The ability of both Cruz and McMullin to perform well among Utah Republicans (in spite of their vast ideological differences) demonstrates clear antipathy to Trump by both the conservative and moderate wings of the state party.

Moving beyond Trump's 2016 campaign, I return to the aforementioned group of establishment, typically moderate, Republicans who sought to undermine the arch-conservative wing of the Utah GOP. One of the long-term strategies pursued by the group involved

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[70] "GOP votes to hold presidential caucus." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, March 8, 2015.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Gehrke, Robert. "After Utah caucus buoys Cruz, candidates reload for April fights." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, March 23, 2016.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Price, Michelle L. "Utah governor says he favors return to presidential primary." *Associated Press State Wire: Utah (UT)*, March 24, 2016.

[75] Canham, Matt. "Ruzicka joins other Utahns in push to block Trump at GOP convention." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, June 20, 2016.

[76] "Ex-CIA agent, BYU grad running for president as independent." *Associated Press State Wire: Utah (UT)*, August 11, 2016.

fundamentally changing the primary system of the Utah GOP. Count My Vote, formed originally in 2012, sought to remove the neighborhood caucus system and replace it with a direct primary.[77] On the other hand, the past several election cycles had gradually allowed some arch-conservative Republicans to take leadership positions within the party.[78] Measures originally meant to preserve establishment Republican voices in the party now protected the conservatives in certain jurisdictions like Utah County.[79]

There were three distinct political actors involved in the proposal to change the primary rules. First, Count My Vote sought to change the party's primary system from outside of the party organization. Count My Vote cited the small numbers of extreme delegates, who ultimately decide primary elections for the entire state, as the reason for taking action.[80] Second, the state legislature and Republican Governor Gary Herbert sought to appease the very party delegates that elected them in the first place; however, they were also trying to defuse Count My Vote's threat to circumvent the state legislature and seek resolution via ballot proposition.[81] Third, the state party's arch-conservative leadership and delegates at the time, helmed by state party chair James Evans, stood to lose influence if any changes were made to the primary system. Therefore, they adamantly opposed any proposals within the party to increase caucus participation or otherwise address any of the issues that Count My Vote raised.[82]

Ultimately, the state legislature and Count My Vote compromised on legislation that was signed into law in March of 2014.[83] Senate Bill 54 (SB54) kept the caucus system, but added the petition option for a candidate to seek the primary nomination without needing to win a convention vote. If the petition option were available in 2010, for instance, Senator Bob Bennett could have placed himself on the primary ballot directly with enough signatures from Republican voters and avoided the contentious state convention entirely. The conservative Utah GOP leadership, paralyzed by its refusal to make proactive changes from within the party, were effectively boxed out of the discourse. The state party sued the state of Utah over SB54 and subjected itself to years of litigation costs that put the party in significant debt.[84] After the Supreme Court refused to hear the lawsuit in 2019,[85] the 2018 Court of Appeals ruling would stand that rendered SB54 constitutional.[86]

Once SB54 was passed, the Utah Republican Party took strides to preserve as much of their remaining power in light of the incoming changes to its primary system. The underlying

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[77] Leavitt, Michael O. "A better nominating process." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, January 8, 2012: G01.

[78] "Republicans balk at giving big money interests control of nominating process." *Salt Lake City Examiner (UT)*, March 30, 2013.

[79] Rolly, Paul. "Rolly: Utah's GOP purists are their own worst enemy." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, January 13, 2014.

[80] Gehrke, Robert. "GOP Chair: Count My Vote will prevail if party fights change." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, September 21, 2013.

[81] McCombs, Brady. "Gov. Herbert approves changes to caucus system." *Associated Press State Wire: Utah (UT)*, March 10, 2014.

[82] Davis, Richard. "Utah politics are about to change, despite parties." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, September 25, 2013.

[83] "Groups reach deal on Utah caucus system." *Standard-Examiner (Ogden, UT)*, March 2, 2014.

[84] "Our View: A petulant GOP lawsuit." *Standard-Examiner (Ogden, UT)*, December 2, 2014.

[85] Schott, Bryan. "Utah election officials say they will ignore illegal GOP bylaw." *Utah Policy*. December 23, 2019.

[86] Ibid.

logic was that candidates would opt for the petition option if they believed their appeal to the Utah Republican electorate was greater than their appeal to the much more conservative and extreme Utah Republican delegates at the state convention. Therefore, one approach the state GOP took was to quash any candidates that could benefit from SB54's petition option. The preferential treatment of convention-seeking candidates over petition-seeking ones appears most clearly in rule changes toward party neutrality: party leadership and staff could now fully endorse and support (financially or otherwise) candidates who participated in the state convention, and deny the same privileges to candidates utilizing the petition. Other, even more extreme options never came to pass, including stripping petition-using candidates of their party membership. Another failed party proposal involved the creation of vetting committees that would grant a candidate membership of the Republican Party. Eligible candidates for the Republican nomination must be a Republican party member, so the committees could in effect bar candidates from running as a Republican.[87] Finally, the Utah GOP flirted with intentionally losing their status as a "qualified political party" in 2016, which would have either removed Republican candidates' ability to appear on the ballot or have forced them to run as independents.[88]

The 2016 election cycle would be the first time Utah candidates for office could pursue the petition option and avoid the convention.[89] Amid lingering tension between the state party and Republican elected officials for the passage of SB54, the divide only grew as Republican incumbents from across the ideological spectrum began choosing to utilize the petition, angering delegates. Governor Gary Herbert, Senator Mike Lee, and 35 other Republican candidates filed their intent to pursue the petition option as early as possible in January of 2016.[90] Utah's Lieutenant Governor's office encouraged candidates to pursue all options available to them, and even the campaign manager for Lee (who benefitted the most by the state convention vote in 2010) called it "political malpractice" to not pursue these paths.[91] The decision by Lee to utilize the petition option, in particular, was significant in that the state party began to view Lee as an establishment Republican and not as a champion of the grassroots as he was in 2010. Overall, about one-third of candidates in the 2016 primaries declared an intent to gather signatures, out of 276 candidates eligible to do so.[92] Others who cited confidence in their relationship with delegates, like conservative House Representative Jason Chaffetz, decried the petition process.[93]

What has the landscape of Utah Republican politics looked like since 2016? Generally speaking, the passage of SB54 worked to elect less extreme Republicans to office, much to the chagrin of the state party who lost much influence in nominating candidates. The state party

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[87] Rolly, Paul. "Rolly: Does chairman's 'Star Chamber' proposal violate GOP by-laws?" *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 1, 2015.

[88] Davidson, Lee. "Utah Libertarians become first 'qualified party' under new election law." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 12, 2015.

[89] Davidson, Lee. "Salt Lake, Davis GOP picking favorites before primary election." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 26, 2016.

[90] Gehrke, Robert. "As signature gathering begins in Utah, pros are taking to the streets." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, January 4, 2016.

[91] Hogsten, Leah. "Utah Sen. Mike Lee first to collect signatures and go through convention". *The Salt Lake Tribune*. December 11, 2015.

[92] "Just 15% used signatures to get on ballot." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, April 23, 2016.

[93] Davidson, Lee. "New Utah nomination system helps some candidates survive, but conventions decide most races." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, April 29, 2016.

remains more extreme and conservative than many of the state's Republican elected officials: chair elections, for example, are frequently contested along the continuing fight against SB54.[94] In contrast, Republican elected officials and the broader Republican electorate have mutually benefited one another. No longer required to only cater to convention delegates, a candidate losing the convention vote but nevertheless winning the primary election is not uncommon. For example, mainstream Republican incumbent Governor Gary Herbert lost the convention vote 55 to 45 percent yet won the broader primary against the same primary challenger 72 to 28 percent on the way to his reelection in 2016. Similar patterns have also occurred in U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and state legislature races.[95]

Conservative Chair James Evans, who led the crusade against SB54 and isolated the party from Republican elected officials, lost in the first round of balloting for the 2017 state chair race.[96] After observing years of costly SB54 litigation that amounted to nothing, Rob Anderson– a self-described "moderate"– ran for chair under the promise that the party would drop the party's lawsuit and re-focus on helping Republicans win elections.[97] Anderson would go on to win 56-44 against a conservative candidate to succeed Evans as chair.[98] After months of arguing and stalling by the more stalwart state central committee, Anderson dropped the lawsuit unilaterally, citing a bylaw allowing him and the other party officers to "take any and all action necessary to make sure that the party does not have a deficit situation longer than six months".[99]

In response to Anderson's decision, a special central committee meeting was illegitimately scheduled with conservative software company CEO David Bateman, who agreed to single-handedly pay off the Utah GOP's outstanding debt– estimated at $400,000 in December of 2017.[100] This minority faction of the central committee, helmed by Bateman, continued to rely on the strategy of scheduling special meetings with little notice and at inconvenient times to vote on issues favorable to their aims. The state party secretary, blatantly supporting this faction, defied Anderson and the rest of the state party by ratifying the attendance of such meetings and making them officially binding.[101] The minority faction passed a February 2018 resolution violating SB54 (which, at this point in time, was a four-year-old law), threatening to strip the entire state party of qualified political party status.[102] Anderson stated his intent to ignore the

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[94] Roche, Lisa Riley. "Utah GOP chair race focused on SB54 fight." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, May 15, 2017.

[95] Davidson, Lee and Courtney Tanner. "Utah Republican delegates force Mitt Romney into a primary election with state lawmaker Mike Kennedy in the race for the U.S. Senate". *The Salt Lake Tribune*. April 21, 2018.

[96] "The Latest: Utah Republicans oust two-term party chair." *Associated Press State Wire: Utah (UT)*, May 20, 2017.

[97] Roche, Lisa Riley. "Utah GOP chair race focused on SB54 fight." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, May 15, 2017.

[98] Davidson, Lee. "New Utah GOP chairman vows to fix party's debt, win back disenfranchised conservatives - Pilot Anderson says the party needs to tackle its $400K debt and boost membership; Chaffetz gives emotional farewell, says he 'helped lead the charge' to stop Clinton's election." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 20, 2017.

[99] Davidson, Lee. "Utah Republicans to drop lawsuit over SB54 law on picking candidates; right wing says it may oust state GOP chairman." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, November 1, 2017.

[100] Rolly, Paul. "Rolly: Utah GOP insiders call a rushed meeting to consider a $400K bailout, but party boss says it's not legit." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, December 14, 2017.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Romboy, Dennis. "New GOP bylaw targets signature-gatherers." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, February 27, 2018.

new resolution, noting that "26 percent of the [state central committee], or 48 of the 717,771 registered Utah Republicans" pushed through the change.[103]

Bateman, the software CEO, effectively bankrolled the party and demanded control of the SB54 lawsuit and influence in the organization in exchange. At the 2018 state convention, Bateman was texting delegates on the convention floor to coordinate votes against procedural measures.[104] The end result was four hours of heated floor arguments and zero agenda items voted on.[105] In March 2019, chair Anderson was censured by the state central committee after six hours of infighting.[106] Soon after, Anderson declined to run for another term in the upcoming chair race, citing an inability to unify the party.[107]

The minority faction's greatest tactics were to disrupt and stall opposing agenda items and by scheduling their own meetings. In spite of these strengths, the group fell short at widely-attended meetings where their numbers were dwarfed, and when agenda items finally came up for votes. At the 2019 convention, the arch-conservative candidate for chair lost by thirty percentage points to establishment candidate Derek Brown, who had the endorsement of Republican elected officials.[108] All officers elected in 2019 were new, including a new secretary to replace the one who ratified the minority faction's otherwise illegitimate special meetings.[109] Several hardline members of the state central committee were also ousted.[110] Finally, the wealthy Bateman once again offered to pay off the debts of the party in May 2019 in exchange for demands, including to "evangelize" the party platform;[111] this offer appears to have been rebuffed by the new wave of party leadership.

Two chairs have served since Brown's election. The election of Carson Jorgensen and other officers in 2021 stood in direct defiance of mainstream Republican Governor Spencer Cox's slate of chosen candidates.[112] Jorgensen, however, was more of an outsider than a hardline conservative. He ran into issues with the archconservative faction when the group attempted to dictate agenda items to him, so it was Jorgensen who finally stamped out the party bylaws that were illegitimately passed back in 2018.[113] Jorgensen was succeeded by Rob Axson, a former

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[103] "Utah GOP chairman will ignore 'illegal' new bylaw — which may help keep Republicans on the ballot." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, March 13, 2018.

[104] Gehrke, Robert. "Gehrke: Utah's Republican convention was a marathon of odd candidates, voting errors and delegate curveballs." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, April 21, 2018.

[105] Roche, Lisa Riley. "GOP forces Romney, Curtis into primaries." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, April 22, 2018.

[106] "Utah Republican leaders censure the party chairman for alleged abuse of authority. He warns of 'anarchy' from action by small faction." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, March 18, 2019.

[107] "Utah GOP chair won't run again amid party division." *Associated Press State Wire: Utah (UT)*, March 21, 2019.

[108] "Utah Republicans elect Derek Brown as chairman to lead all-new team of GOP officers vowing unity and focus." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 4, 2019.

[109] Ibid.

[110] "Dave Bateman offers to pay off the Utah GOP's debt — again — with a few conditions." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 20, 2019.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Schott, Bryan. "Here's what you missed from the Utah Republican convention - Sen. Mitt Romney was booed, and Carson Jorgensen, 32, won the election for GOP party chair." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, May 2, 2021.

[113] Schott, Bryan. "'The Rundown': The Utah GOP wants to ditch signature gathering for candidates - Party looks to GOP lawmakers to change the law, but only if the Legislature is 'all for it'." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, November 16, 2021.

staffer to Mike Lee. Axson, elected unopposed in 2023,[114] solidified establishment control of the party. At some point in this period, quorum requirement changes restricted the archconservative faction's previous ability to enact changes without broader attendance. At least at the very top, then, control of the party has skewed toward the establishment.

Two efforts led by arch-conservatives in the state legislature tried to keep alive the fight to empower the nominating convention, but neither would materialize. Senate Bill 205 in 2020 was opposed by Governor Cox, who held a secret meeting of fellow mainstream legislative leaders, aides, and state GOP chair Brown to negotiate a deal that killed the bill.[115] Later, House Bill 393 was introduced in 2023 by Rep. Jordan Teuscher but quickly died in committee.[116] Chair Jorgensen supported this bill, which would allow candidates with a 70 percent vote threshold to clinch the nomination regardless of candidates getting on the ballot via petition. Ironically, this measure was originally proposed by the moderate Count My Vote in 2014,[117] the group who was vehemently opposed by the arch-conservative wing of the party at every turn.

While the state GOP has preached unity in recent years, they have remained remarkably cool on Donald Trump. Spencer Cox and Mitt Romney represent some of Trump's largest opposition within Republican Party circles to this day. The Utah GOP released a statement in February 2021 in support of Senators Romney and Lee after they voted differently on whether to convict Trump after the events of January 6th.[118] A few months later, the state convention took a floor vote to censure Romney and the measure failed, indicating that perhaps even state delegates have become less extreme in recent years.[119] Some county Republican parties still act of their own accord– Weber County, for example, censured Romney after the convention vote failed– but seem unable to gather sufficient numbers to shape any decision-making of the party at the state level.[120]

Conclusion

Out of the eight state Republican parties studied, the Utah GOP has proven to be the most able to weather the storms of national Republican movements—completely in-line with my initial judgment: the Utah GOP registers as "Low" in intraparty conflict across all three eras of

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[114] Schott, Bryan. "'Utah, like Florida, is where freedom works,' Gov. Ron DeSantis tells Utah GOP during keynote speech - 'The hat is here to stay,' outgoing Republican party chair Carson Jorgensen told delegates at GOP's annual organizing convention." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, April 22, 2023.

[115] Schott, Bryan. "'The Rundown': The Utah GOP wants to ditch signature gathering for candidates - Party looks to GOP lawmakers to change the law, but only if the Legislature is 'all for it'." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, November 16, 2021.

[116] Schott, Bryan. "Elections audits and restrictions for changing parties: Here's how voting systems will change in Utah. - During the 2023 legislative session, lawmakers introduced more than three dozen different changes to Utah's elections systems, but only 13 will see the governor's desk." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, March 14, 2023.

[117] Schott, Bryan. "Should party delegates be able to keep candidates who gathered signatures in Utah off a primary ballot? - Proposed bill would forego a primary election if a candidate gets 70% support at a party convention." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, February 9, 2023.

[118] Rodgers, Bethany. "Utah Republican Party chair says he will not run for reelection - After one term as head of the state's GOP, Derek Brown says it's time for him to move on." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, March 16, 2021.

[119] Anderson, Emily. "Weber County GOP censures Romney, elects new leadership." *Standard-Examiner (Ogden, UT)*, May 8, 2021.

[120] Ibid.

study. The Christian Right was largely redundant: Utah's conservative electorate and legislature had by that point already cemented the state's status as a leader in anti-abortion legislation. The Tea Party was successful in supplanting Senator Bob Bennett in 2010 and scaring Senator Orrin Hatch into embracing Tea Party talking points in the run-up to his reelection campaign in 2012. However, establishment Republican leaders quickly neutralized the primary avenue of insurgent influence– the state nominating convention– from the top-down (through changes to Utah's primary nomination system) and from the bottom-up (by flooding neighborhood caucuses with LDS members). Finally, state Republican leaders never mobilized toward Donald Trump and extremist state party members seemed incapable of overcoming the moderating changes made to Utah's primary system in the 2010s, resulting in establishment control of the party for the past few years.

In this chapter, I argued that in addition to Utah's deeply conservative electorate, features of the state Republican Party and recent changes spurred on by establishment Republicans have made it especially durable to insurgent conflict. The Utah GOP cedes much of its organizational authority to state convention attendees, and its neighborhood caucus system makes it possible for grassroots movements at the neighborhood level to quickly proliferate all the way up to significant influence at the state convention (like the Tea Party in 2010). Amid concerns that the nominating convention was unrepresentative, produced more extreme candidates, and essentially determined general election winners, however, groups of establishment Republicans fought from the outside to open the party's primary system to make it more participatory and worked with the LDS church to encourage political participation. Therefore, I find strong support for my state-level institutions hypothesis: the powerful linkages between groups like Count My Vote and Republican elected officials in Utah were enough to stave off efforts to close off the party by extreme party insurgents. In recent years, the party has tried to punish candidates seeking to avoid the state convention, but so far, their efforts are in vain: candidates receiving support from the broader Utah Republican electorate are often able to secure electoral success in the face of state party animosity.

I also find general support for my state party hypothesis, though not to the extent seen with the state-level institutions hypothesis. Features of the Utah GOP have the potential to be a double-edged sword for party factions of any background. The state's Republican convention system is a clear opportunity for groups to centralize political influence, as seen in 2010, although the awareness of establishment Utah Republicans to take advantage of the system for themselves in subsequent years means that the convention system may remain out of the hands of party insurgents for some time. On the other hand, I find mixed support, at best, for my party competition hypothesis. Utah's heavy Republican tilt has resulted in relatively little intraparty turmoil over the past few decades, working against the hypothesis-- although the durability of an extreme conservative faction within the party may be a sign that control of the state party is far more tenuous than the party's history might indicate.

The Utah Republican Party stands out for its resistance to nationalization seen in many other state parties today. Similar to the Republican Party of Kentucky, Utah's Republican Party wins elections up and down the ballot and doesn't have a strong working relationship with the Republican National Committee of recent years. In contrast to the Kentucky GOP, however, the divide between the Utah state party and Utah Republican elected officials remains high. The Utah GOP has become much more extreme than the state's electorate over the past few decades, and with the advent of the petition option (and the subsequent fights against candidates utilizing it) it appears unlikely that the state party's conventions will moderate in coming years.

What else does the future hold for the Utah Republican Party? Several Republican leaders in Utah, including Governor Cox and U.S. Senator John Curtis, remain skeptical of Donald Trump.[121] Both Cox and Curtis were reelected in 2024, so state Republican leadership's attitudes toward Trump will continue throughout Trump's final presidential term. State party leadership is more neutral but hardly pro-Trump, either; the current chair, Rob Axson, continues to prioritize the unification of the party over deference to any specific candidate, and was recently reelected to another two-year term in May of 2025.[122] Axson, endorsed by Trump, was narrowly reelected over former state House representative Phil Lyman, an election denier who was pardoned by Trump in 2020 after being convicted for staging a protest inside federally protected lands.[123] Lyman also challenged Cox in the gubernatorial primary and handily defeated Cox at the Utah GOP's state convention,[124] although Cox would defeat Lyman by nine percentage points in the actual primary election. Therefore, it is clear that a more extreme wing remains active within the party and will likely continue to push back against establishment Republicans and the Republican leaders in office.

[121] Tomco, Brigham. "Races to watch in Utah on Tuesday — and what candidates have said about Trump, Harris - The contest between Trump and Harris shaped the debates for U.S. House, Senate and Utah governor." *Deseret News, The (Salt Lake City, UT)*, November 5, 2024.
[122] Beal-Cvetko, Bridger. "Incumbent Rob Axson defeats Phil Lyman in vote to lead Utah GOP." *KSL News*. May 17, 2025.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Coombs, Carlene. "Trent Staggs, Phil Lyman win nominations for races at testy state GOP convention." *Standard-Examiner (Ogden, UT)*, April 28, 2024.

Chapter 3: Republican Party of Pennsylvania

Introduction

Pennsylvania is remarkably competitive between the two major parties. Its electorate has chosen Democratic and Republican governors and presidential candidates in roughly equal amounts, and party registration statistics reveal a close divide between Democrats and Republicans in the electorate, as well as a low number of unaffiliated voters. Despite the competitiveness between parties, however, the Republican Party of Pennsylvania has also faced several internal developments over the past few decades. Staunchly pro-life Democratic Governor Bob Casey, for example, made the Christian Right hesitate in Pennsylvania Republican circles during a time when the total integration of an evangelical wing was observed in many other state Republican parties. Two decades later, the shrinking moderate wing of the Pennsylvania GOP almost entirely vanished with the successful elections of conservatives Tom Corbett and Pat Toomey. That said, the role of the Tea Party movement in the state party was minimal, perhaps due to the high level of ideological overlap between newer Tea Party Republicans and the conservative wing of the party that began emerging in the 2000s. Finally, Donald Trump's victory in Pennsylvania prompted a pivot within the state party toward pro-Trump Republicanism that continues to this day. Therefore, my initial judgment of the Pennsylvania GOP as "Low" in Christian Right and Tea Party intraparty conflict, and "High" in Trump intraparty conflict, has withstood the greater in-depth analysis that this chapter provides.

In this chapter, I argue that the institutional design of the Republican Party of Pennsylvania kept intraparty conflict at arm's length through most of its recent history, lending direct support to my state party hypothesis. However, features like the closed primary and rise of outsider Republican groups combined to crowd out all factions of the state party except for its most extreme conservatives. After several elections revealed the state party's loss of influence over primary candidates and election outcomes, state party leadership turned toward Donald Trump throughout Trump's first term and in doing so began to emulate the Republican National Committee's credo more than it ever had before. The strongest weapon that the state party has historically wielded– the endorsement– was suspended in 2022; in the absence of guidance from the state party, candidates touted their support for Trump and sought Trump's endorsement harder than before. While I find no concrete evidence that would support or refute the state-level institutions hypothesis, the lack of a relationship between Republican elected officials (many of which jumped ship to align with Trump) and the state party may have catalyzed the latter's transformation into a simulacrum of the national GOP platform and ideals.

For most of the past few decades, the Republican Party of Pennsylvania had been exceptionally influential in recruiting and promoting primary candidates. The party structure is governed from the top down, with deference to state party officers and Republican elected officials who serve on the state party's leadership committee. Populous counties are overrepresented in the state GOP's central committee and the state party chair wields significant appointive power and other formal duties. There are no local, precinct, or neighborhood arms of the Pennsylvania GOP, nor does the state party offer a state convention for rank-and-file members. Therefore, outside organizations find few opportunities to widen their representation within the state party beyond what is already present. However, the state party also became more

homogeneously conservative: party leaders and elected officials became more conservative and hostile to the state's previously large moderate Republican wing, reinforced by features like the closed primaries of Pennsylvania.

Once a powerful tool, the state party's pre-primary endorsements issued to candidates became feckless as more candidates were either financed by outside organizations or emboldened enough to spurn the state party's endorsement process altogether. Outpaced by its competition–Democrats and outside organizations alike– the state GOP hit its nadir in the middle of the 2010s. In a way, Donald Trump's surprising victory in Pennsylvania in 2016 gave the state party an opportunity to rebound: the chair of the state party sought to curry favor with Trump, claiming credit for Trump's success in the state, and leadership elections since 2016 have revolved around pro-Trump support. In recent years, Pennsylvania elections fell along Trump-specific faultlines which yielded only a modicum of success for Republicans. Yet, this partial resurgence of the state GOP came at the cost of a statewide identity for Pennsylvania Republicans and the hollowing out of what once was a powerful institution operating in state politics.

Background Information

Pennsylvania			
Pennsylvania Elections		Republican Party of Pennsylvania	
Primary type	Closed	**State party officer elections**	By state committee
Presidential/state primaries	Separate events	**State party officer elections schedule**	Odd-numbered year after presidential election year
Presidential delegate allocation	Hybrid - majority of delegates directly elected on primary ballot	**State party convention cycle**	None
State election cycle	Even-numbered, non-presidential years	**Pre-primary endorsements**	Yes (suspended in 2022)

Pennsylvania is the fifth most populous state in the country behind California, Texas, Florida, and New York.[1] However, Pennsylvania experienced negative or stagnant population growth for most of the 20th century,[2] attributed to the decline of the Rust Belt and the egress of Pennsylvania's large rural population.[3] Economic considerations continue to drive Pennsylvania's population elsewhere, particularly away from the western, rural parts of the state.[4] Racially, Pennsylvania is higher than the national average for its proportion of both white[5]

[1] U.S. Census Bureau.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Parish, Marley. "Population decline in Pa. is happening faster than expected, data suggest. Here's how the state is dealing with it." *Spotlight PA*. July 17, 2024.

[4] "PA's Population Continues Its Troubling Decline". *Commonwealth Foundation*. December 20, 2023.

[5] U.S. Census Bureau.

and black citizens.[6] In terms of absolute numbers, however, Pennsylvania has one of the larger Hispanic populations among all states,[7] including a large and fast-growing Puerto Rican community.[8] The diocese of Philadelphia contributes to Pennsylvania's substantial Catholic population, one of the largest in the country.[9] Finally, Pennsylvania's evangelical population is higher than any other state in the northeast (an estimated 19 percent in 2014), though nowhere near the levels of Southern states and falls in the bottom half of states nationally.[10]

Since the middle of the 20th century, Democrats have maintained a registration advantage over Republicans in Pennsylvania. Democratic registration reached a high of 51 percent of the electorate in 2009.[11] However, the gap appears to be closing: as of 2024, 44 percent of voters are registered Democrats, 40 are registered Republicans, and 16 are unaffiliated.[12] Among states that report voter registration statistics, Pennsylvania has one of the lowest proportions of unaffiliated voters– even compared to other states that hold closed primary elections.[13]

As was typical of northeast states, Pennsylvania had a long history of reliably voting for Republican candidates. The larger political landscape of Pennsylvania only began to shift toward two-party competition during Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. Control of either chamber in the state legislature became volatile and susceptible to changes in party control in any given election year. Pennsylvania is also known for producing moderate Republican governors in the past several decades. Until conservative Republican Tom Corbett's election in 2010, previously elected Republicans to the office were renowned for their moderate leadership, including William Scranton (1963-1967),[14] Dick Thornburgh (1979-1987),[15] and Tom Ridge (1995-2001).[16]

Republicans regained control of the Pennsylvania senate in the 1980 elections and controlled it for all but one year since then. Lieutenant Governor William Scranton lost in the open gubernatorial race of 1986 to Democrat Bob Casey Sr. by less than 80,000 votes. In an uncommon deviation from expected party roles, Casey was the staunchly anti-abortion candidate while Scranton advocated for choice.[17] Two years later, Pat Robertson secured nearly 80,000 votes at the Pennsylvania Republican primary and was the guest of honor at a Pennsylvania GOP fundraiser despite the nomination contest being clinched by Bush for weeks.[18] The magnitude of

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[6] "Black Population by State". *Data Pandas*. November 24, 2024.

[7] "Hispanic Population by State 2025". *World Population Review*. 2025.

[8] Piper, Jessica. "Nearly a million Puerto Ricans live in swing states". *Politico*. October 28, 2024.

[9] "Statistics by Diocese". Catholic Hierarchy. 2005.

[10] The Association of Religion Data Archives.

[11] Meyer, Katie and Carter Walker. "Democrats in Pa. approach 2024 election with slimmest voter registration advantage in decades". *Spotlight PA*. September 18, 2024.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ballotpedia. Data aggregated from state voter registration statistics published by each state.

[14] McFadden, Robert D. "William W. Scranton, 96, G.O.P. Prodigy Who Led Pennsylvania, Is Dead". *The New York Times*. July 29, 2013.

[15] McFadden, Robert D. "Richard Thornburgh, Former Governor and Attorney General, Dies at 88". *The New York Times*. December 31, 2020.

[16] "Pennsylvania's Tom Ridge Appointed to Bush Cabinet". *PBS News*. September 20, 2001.

[17] Eshleman Jr., Russell E. and Dan Meyers. "Abortion Issue Casts Its Shadow On This Year's Gubernatorial Race." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, October 22, 1986: A01.

[18] Seelye, Katharine. "Robertson Invitation Roils GOP." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, April 15, 1988: B18.

evangelical Robertson supporters in the state in 1988 suggests that the issue of abortion may have been crucial in deciding the 1986 gubernatorial election between Casey Sr. and Scranton two years prior.

Pennsylvania elections led to divided party control for almost the entire 21st century. The most notable exception to this trend occurred from 2010 to 2014, after Republicans picked up thirteen seats in the Pennsylvania state house and elected Corbett as governor to control statewide government. In relation to the national Tea Party movement, however, there were very few overt Tea Party successes in Pennsylvania in 2010. Republicans Pat Toomey and Tom Corbett ran a conservative campaign that attracted Tea Party support, but neither formally ran on the Tea Party platform.[19] The Tea Party candidate with arguably the widest reach was Sam Rohrer,[20] who Corbett defeated in the Republican gubernatorial primary by over a 2-to-1 margin. Another candidate with direct Tea Party ties, Tim Burns,[21] lost twice in a calendar year to a Democrat for the 12th congressional district U.S. House seat. Finally, several Tea Party-affiliated candidates emerged in U.S. House and state legislative primaries, although only one Tea Party candidate won their primary (out of 28 primary contests with an incumbent seeking reelection).[22]

After voting for every Democratic presidential candidate since Bill Clinton, the Pennsylvania electorate opted for Donald Trump in 2016. Down the ballot, Republican control of both chambers of the state legislature reached majorities not seen since the 1950s. Election results since 2016 demonstrate the increased volatility of the Pennsylvania electorate. For example, Republicans lost 20 seats in the state house from 2016 to 2022. Democrats invested heavily to win the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Republican Pat Toomey in 2022,[23] only to relinquish their hold on the other U.S. Senate seat two years later when three-term incumbent Bob Casey Jr. lost by less than 16,000 votes to Republican Dave McCormick. Finally, Pennsylvania voted against Trump's reelection in 2020, but selected him again in 2024. The frequency of wins and losses of both parties, from presidential elections to statewide contests, contributes to Pennsylvania's continued image as an important swing state.

Prior political science research attempting to typify Pennsylvania and its Republican party found it to be substantially richer in its history of politicians and elections than in Utah. Elazar (1966), Sharkansky (1969), and Mayhew (1986) all painted the picture of Pennsylvania state politics as an incredibly organized and transactional political market, where both parties frequently utilized patronage and slated candidates up and down all levels of government.[24] Sorauf opined that "the tradition of politics as a system of immediate and direct rewards…means that Pennsylvania politics are nonideological and often issueless", perhaps giving rise to the

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[19] Newsmakers of the Year: The Tea Party Building Steam." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, December 26, 2010: A01; Brennan, Chris. "Tea Party left holding the bag?" *Philadelphia Daily News (PA)*, February 12, 2010: 08.

[20] Brennan, Chris. "Tea Party left holding the bag?" *Philadelphia Daily News (PA)*, February 12, 2010: 08.

[21] Wereschagin, Mike. "Election volunteers in big last-minute push for turnout." *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (PA)*, November 1, 2010.

[22] Murphy, Jan. "Incumbents' success stuns some pundits - Resources and recognition helped all but one of the state lawmakers seeking re- election win nomination, experts say." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, May 20, 2010: A01.

[23] Tamari, Jonathan. "The Pa. GOP's no good, very bad, terrible election." *Philadelphia Daily News (PA)*, November 13, 2022: 4.

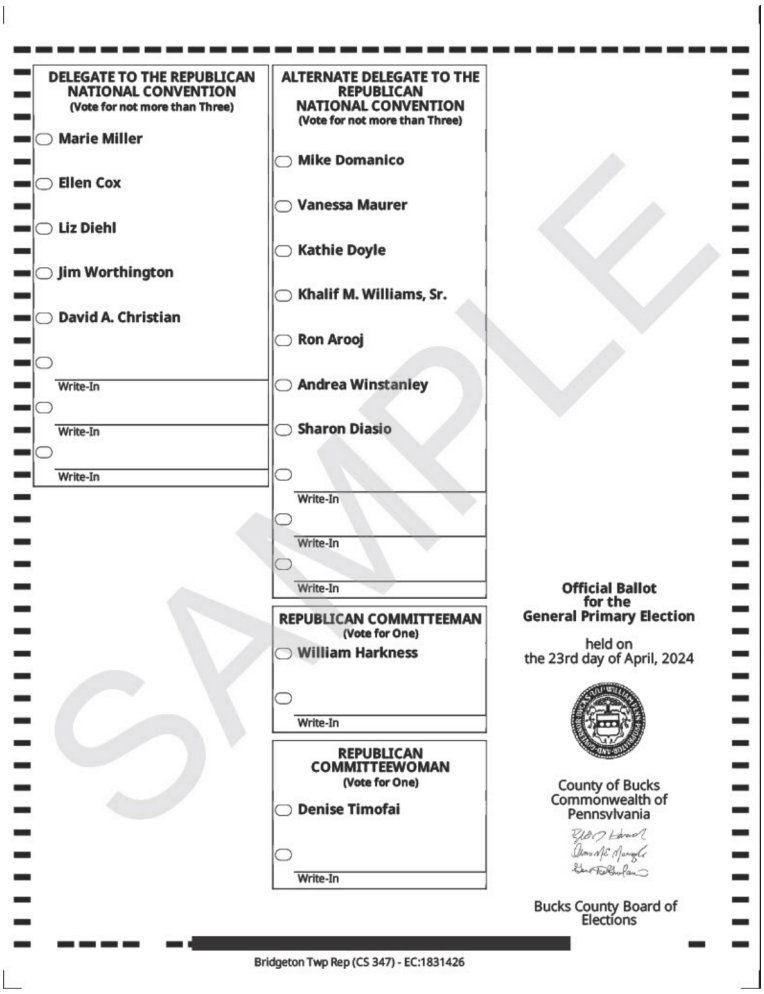
[24] Elazar, Daniel Judah. "American federalism: A view from the states." 1966; Sharkansky, Ira. "The utility of Elazar's political culture: A research note." *Polity* 2, no. 1 (1969): 66-83. 1969; Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986

relative similarities between Democratic and Republican candidates in statewide contests through the late 20th century.[25] Electoral differences notwithstanding, Gibson et al. (1983) ranked Pennsylvania as the state with the most powerful organized parties across their time period of interest (1975-1980)—including listing Pennsylvania's Democratic Party as the strongest organizationally out of all one hundred state parties.[26]

Election and primary laws

Pennsylvania state law closes each party's primary off from other political parties and independent voters. The state laws around delegate selection require parties to list a majority of their national delegate candidates on the same primary ballot as the presidential candidates themselves. While Democratic delegate candidates are listed alongside their committed presidential candidate, however, Pennsylvania Republicans alone list their delegates as uncommitted. Delegates elected in this way are officially unbound to any specific candidate. Many in the party consider it an unspoken rule for a delegate to vote for the candidate who secured the most votes in the congressional district they represent.[27] In recent years, presidential candidates have become more proactive in identifying slates of loyal delegates. However, presidential candidates seeking to take advantage of Pennsylvania's primary system face significant headwinds: the primary ballot will not identify which delegates support which candidate, so voters are tasked with recognizing the names of particular delegates they know to be supporters of a specific candidate.[28] An example ballot below lists the 2024 RNC delegate candidates without any indications of ties to presidential candidates.

[25] Sorauf, Frank Joseph. *Party and representation: Legislative politics in Pennsylvania*. 1963.
[26] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.
[27] "Erie delegate pivots from Cruz to Trump at convention By Nico Salvatori Erie Times-News." *Erie Times-News (PA)*, July 20, 2016.
[28] Levy, Marc. "Pennsylvania GOP presidential delegate chase adds to mystery." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, April 21, 2016.



Each political party in Pennsylvania holds a state party committee meeting early in election years to endorse candidates. A party only endorses one primary candidate for each office, and lends the candidate financial and party support. Endorsement meetings are held weeks before the deadline for prospective candidates to file their intent to run for office, and months before the actual primary election; as such, the meetings are by far the party's most effective tool in controlling the field of primary candidates. Candidates seeking the endorsement benefit the most from being longer-tenured members of the party and must have the support of members of the state party committee. An increasing number of candidates run in the primary without the party's endorsement, suggesting a weakening of the party's influence relative to its own candidates' campaigns.

Prior to the 2020 elections, Pennsylvania was one of only a handful of remaining states that still provided a straight-ticket voting option on its ballots.[29] Straight-ticket voting may give influence to the state parties by reinforcing the two-party system, particularly at the national level;[30] voters choosing the straight-ticket option could be saddling a county- or municipal-level

[29] National Conference of State Legislatures.

[30] E.g. Gorelkina, Olga, Ioanna Grypari, and Erin Hengel. "The theory of straight ticket voting." Social Choice and Welfare 60, no. 3 (2023): 365-381.

candidate to the ideology of a presidential candidate running on a comprehensive national platform. An election reform bill signed into law in 2019 removed straight-ticket voting in Pennsylvania.[31] The bill also introduced universal voting by mail-in ballot and made the deadline window to register to vote more amenable to voters.[32]

Campaign finance laws in Pennsylvania are mixed. On the one hand, Pennsylvania is one of nine states with no limits or restrictions on campaign contributions from individuals, the state parties, or PACs.[33] Of these nine, only Pennsylvania, North Dakota, and Texas contrast unlimited spending from these sources with a total ban on corporate and union contributions.[34] Pennsylvania also ranks in the bottom half of states in terms of campaign finance disclosure and transparency.[35]

Finally, Pennsylvania's redistricting efforts have created controversy since the 21st century. The 2000 and 2010 legislative redistricting efforts were carried out by unified Republican government in the state and produced more reliably Republican districts. In particular, the new maps introduced in 2011 sought to maintain the seats of the five freshman Republican U.S. House members elected in 2010.[36] The decision in *League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (2018) struck down the districts drawn in 2010,[37] which appeared to benefit Democrats, who gained four U.S. House seats in the 2018 election cycle. The redistricting plan drafted by the Republican-led state legislature was fought against by Democratic Governor Tom Wolf;[38] the subsequent plan, created by a special redistricting committee, was considerably less controversial than the ones drafted in 2000 and 2010 and remained largely similar to the map implemented in 2018.[39]

Party rules and bylaws

The Republican Party of Pennsylvania is unique for its apparently durable bylaws. Pennsylvania state law requires parties to send certified copies of their rules to the Pennsylvania Secretary of State, including whenever any rule changes are made. A Pennsylvania Office of Open Records request of all Pennsylvania GOP rules submitted from 2000 to 2024, however, returned only two versions of the party's bylaws. Aside from the dates of ratification on the documents (2012 and 2015) the two documents were identical. The lack of changes to the party's governing documents could indicate a strong institutional organization with little need for formal

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[31] Murphy, Jan. "Election reform measure now law Election Voters can cast ballots by mail starting in April." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, November 3, 2019: 003.

[32] Ibid.

[33] "State Limits on Contributions to Candidates". *National Conference of State Legislatures*. May 2023.

[34] Ibid.

[35] "The State Campaign Finance Index 2022". *Coalition for Integrity*. 2022.

[36] "Creative redistricting: New map has GOP written all over it." *Bucks County Courier Times (Levittown, PA)*, December 16, 2011: A12.

[37] Prose, J.D. "GOP blasts court ruling throwing out congressional map." *Beaver County Times (PA)*, January 25, 2018: A1.

[38] Lai, Jonathan and Sean Collins Walsh. "Redistricting fight heats up as Gov. Wolf pushes back on House proposal Republicans accused of gerrymandering." *Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA)*, December 30, 2021: 6A.

[39] Huangpu, Kate. "Congressional map picked by Pennsylvania Supreme Court unlikely to dramatically alter partisan balance". *Spotlight PA*. February 23, 2022.

updates; however, I argue later that the Pennsylvania GOP's slow speed of modernizing itself was one factor that contributed to the party's loss of influence among Republicans in the state.

The rules laid out for political parties in state law are short and defer to the party organizations themselves. The most concrete stipulation requires the party state committee to meet no later than the sixth Wednesday following the election of its committee members. All other language gives the state parties latitude in structure, elected officers, and governing rules. In turn, the Republican Party of Pennsylvania's bylaws refer frequently to the relevant provisions in Pennsylvania state law that give the party its authority. Similar to other state parties, the Pennsylvania GOP has one larger and one smaller governing body: the state committee and the leadership committee.

Membership of the Pennsylvania GOP state committee is determined by the state's counties. In addition to each county party committee's chairman serving as a member, additional members are allocated as a function of each county's population of registered Republicans in presidential election years. Using the most recent voter registration statistics, larger counties like Allegheny (Pittsburgh) will elect 24 additional members to the state committee in this manner. On the other hand, 32 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties will send two or less additional members each, and twelve of these counties would be unable to elect any bonus members at all.

The exact membership number varies from election cycle to election cycle, but a 265-member vote (taken in 2021) would indicate that the top seven most populous counties by Republican registration can command a majority of votes in the state party. Rules also stand to benefit the top end of the counties. For example, quorum for normal meetings is a simple majority of members; additionally, only one-fifth of members are needed to call a special meeting and can even carry out the meeting on their own. Given Pennsylvania's large rural population, the Pennsylvania GOP appears to be particularly unfriendly to smaller counties who may have tighter linkages to the party's grassroots. Individual county parties have autonomy over their own rules, fundraising, and endorsements, but staking out any influence in the state party framework is difficult for a less populous county.

The party's leadership committee privileges smaller counties even less than the larger state committee do. Voting members include many of the party officers, incumbent Republican leadership at the state level, U.S. Senators, the dean of the Republican delegation to the U.S. House, and the state chairs of the Council of Republican Women and the Young Republicans. Significantly, the chair may appoint up to fourteen members to the leadership committee, which can have a maximum of 38 members. The only concession made to rank-and-file party members is to grant voting membership to each of the six regional caucus chairs. The regional caucuses divide the state into six geographic units, creating a level in the party akin to congressional district parties found in other states. The leadership committee serves in an advisory role to the state party committee and the state chair.

The chair, vice chair, treasurer, secretary, and assistant secretary are elected by the state committee to four-year terms in gubernatorial primary years. The party's national committeeman and committeewoman are elected in presidential years and also serve for four years. The chair exercises significant appointive power in the party: in addition to the aforementioned fourteen appointments the chair can make to the leadership committee, three party committees– credentials, finance, and budget– are either appointed by the chair or work for them. The chair also serves as the president and chief executive officer of the state party. Finally, the chair has significant control over removing members of any of the party committees, delegates, or regional caucuses. The chair appoints a three-member committee and abides by their ruling on a

delinquent member of the party. Only in the removal of officers can the state committee participate, with a two-thirds majority vote needed.

One final motif of the Pennsylvania GOP is their flexibility when it comes to national delegates and candidate endorsements. A vast majority of the state's delegation to the RNC is composed of three delegates from each of Pennsylvania's congressional districts, and these delegates are unbound. Statewide party endorsements, meanwhile, are completely at the discretion of the state committee. Candidates are nominated individually and must earn a majority vote of the state committee to receive an endorsement. The party is not required to issue a slate of endorsements; in fact, intraparty conflict has sprung up in recent years over the decision of the state committee to endorse– or decline to endorse– Republican candidates for office.

Intraparty Conflicts in the Republican Party of Pennsylvania

Social conservatives in Pennsylvania are conflicted

The moderate positions of Republican U.S. Senator Arlen Specter rendered him a frequent target of Republicans running to his right. Specter was challenged in the 1986 primary by an inexperienced anti-abortion conservative,[40] but won with over three-quarters of the vote. Six years later, a more qualified candidate– conservative anti-abortion state representative Stephen Freind–[41] challenged Specter but still only secured 35 percent of the vote. In both elections, Specter's ties to the controlling moderate base of the state party were more than sufficient to defeat his primary challengers. Specter received the party's endorsement in 1986 and 1992 and significantly outraised primary opposition.[42] In spite of Specter's advantages, it is nonetheless a testament to the conservative wing of the party to gain 35 percent of the primary vote by operating outside of the state party's support and fundraising apparatus in 1992.

Governor Bob Casey Sr.'s rare status as a staunch anti-abortion Democrat added another layer of difficulty for Republicans in the 1986 and 1990 gubernatorial elections. The Republican candidates in both years– Lieutenant Governor Bill Scranton in 1986 and Barbara Hafer in 1990– were moderates who ran to the left of Casey on social issues like abortion.[43] Scranton was unopposed as the Republican candidate in 1986. In 1990, some conservatives were dissuaded by the state party from challenging Hafer in a primary, and only Hafer received the party's

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[40] Ferrick Jr., Thomas. "Senate Candidate Counts on Faith in His Campaign Against Specter." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, May 15, 1986: B20.

[41] "Pa. GOP backs Specter; county support strong." *Lancaster New Era (PA)*, January 25, 1992: A01.

[42] Ferrick Jr., Thomas. "Senate Candidate Counts on Faith in His Campaign Against Specter." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, May 15, 1986: B20; Gorenstein, Nathan. "Freind Ad Hits Specter on Donations." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, February 5, 1992: B04.

[43] Ferrick Jr., Thomas. "Casey and Specter Are Winners - Narrow Win on 4th Try." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, November 5, 1986: A01; Reeves, Tim. "Little Tipping Seen in State's Abortion Balance of Power." *Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA)*, November 8, 1990: A04.

endorsement.[44] In spite of the party's efforts, however, anti-abortion activist Peg Luksik entered the primary and, with no fundraising apparatus or prior political experience, nearly upset Hafer by winning 46 percent of the primary vote.[45] Republican leaders in the Pennsylvania GOP loudly abandoned Hafer for months before the general election,[46] and Casey would be reelected by more than a two-to-one margin.

The level of conservative opposition seen in Specter's and Casey's campaigns was absent in other statewide and down-ballot races. In fact, primary competition was mounted by moderates against conservative incumbents in roughly equal amounts as conservative candidates running against moderate incumbents in 1990. Two Republican incumbents– one pro-life, the other pro-choice– lost their state legislative primary elections.[47] Conservative candidates in 1986, 1988, and 1992 were even less successful than in 1990. Two explanations emerge to account for the apparent apathy of the Christian Right (and conservative candidates more generally) in the Pennsylvania GOP during this period.

First, the GOP had many successes and overperformed compared to expectations. Democratic voter registration has eclipsed Republican registration in Pennsylvania for the past several decades. In absolute numbers, a registration snapshot in May of 1986 showed that Republican registered voters were 800,000 shy of having a majority of registered votes in the state;[48] later, in 1996, Democrats had a 400,000 voter advantage over Republicans.[49] Despite a large disparity in party affiliation, Republicans only narrowly lost the 1986 gubernatorial election, retained their majority control of the state senate, and were nearly even with Democrats in the state House and in the U.S. House delegation. Policies passed in the state were also favorable to conservatives and even opponents of abortion rights. The state legislature approved a budget surplus that included tax cuts for businesses and workers,[50] and Governor Casey signed a restrictive abortion bill into law in 1989.[51] Perhaps the successful track record of Pennsylvania Republicans during this period deterred would-be conservative challengers.

Second, the organizational capacity of evangelicals and conservatives in the state was limited. Some Christian Right groups, like the Christian Coalition, had chapters in Pennsylvania and reported successes in winning seats on the state party committee;[52] however, the design of the party's committee– which privileges large urban counties over smaller, rural ones for

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[44] "Pickard withdraws from Republican governor's race." *Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster, PA)*, December 12, 1989: C16.

[45] Kirkpatrick, Rich. "Casey, Singel win easily; Hafer survives challenge." *Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster, PA)*, May 16, 1990: A01.

[46] Pickard, James O. "Barbara Hafer for governor? Sometimes GOP party loyalty asks too much." *Lancaster New Era (PA)*, October 31, 1990: A15.

[47] Kirkpatrick, Rich. "Casey, Singel win easily; Hafer survives challenge." *Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster, PA)*, May 16, 1990: A01.

[48] Hildebeitel, Valerie. "State GOP Chairman Says Races in Lehigh are Pivotal for Party." *Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA)*, May 8, 1986: B04.

[49] Shelly, Peter J. "Christian Coalition on Ropes in PA.." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)*, January 14, 1996: A-8.

[50] "Casey responsible for Pennsylvania's fiscal success." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, December 30, 1988: A8.

[51] Laffan, Denise. "Casey signs abortion bill into state law." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, November 18, 1989: A1.

[52] Leffler, Pete and Tim Reeves. "Fortunes of PA. GOP Remain Tied to Bush." *Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA)*, August 16, 1992: A01.

membership–[53] appeared to make it difficult for evangelicals to increase their foothold. Furthermore, the large base of Catholics in Pennsylvania (which included Democratic Governor Casey) were limited allies to any evangelicals seeking other socially conservative policy goals beyond abortion.[54] Finally, evangelical leaders in Pennsylvania failed to unite around each other. For example, disparate conservative groups in the 1986 primary endorsed Specter over another archconservative in 1992.[55] And Peg Luksik, who nearly upset the moderate candidate in the 1990 gubernatorial primary, was unsupported by anti-abortion leaders despite Luksik's reputation as an anti-abortion activist.[56] Luksik broke away from the Republican party in subsequent elections.[57]

Rick Santorum's election as a U.S. Senator in 1994 represents the greatest triumph of religious conservatives in Pennsylvania in this period, although the faction's victory was short-lived. In the 1992 and 1994 election cycles, the Christian Coalition fought against establishment Republicans to secure modest gains in the Pennsylvania GOP's state party committee.[58] Santorum, a devout Catholic, received the party's endorsement after moderate Republicans failed to field another candidate to oppose him,[59] and Santorum's only primary opposition was an evangelical pastor running with greater religious overtures.[60] Once Santorum became the nominee, however, he hired two Republican operatives who previously worked with Arlen Specter,[61] and Specter himself would campaign on Santorum's behalf.[62] The combined forces of both the moderate and conservative wings of the state party were just enough for Santorum to win in the general election by less than 100,000 votes over the incumbent Democrat (who was appointed to the office in 1991).

The waning power of the Pennsylvania GOP in the 2000s and 2010s

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[53] E.g. Madonna, G. Terry and Robert J. Bresler. "Pennsylvania". In *State party profiles: a 50-state guide to development, organization, and resources*. (1997).

[54] E.g. Baer, John M. "Bill Unleashes Tide of Passion Supporters, Foes of 'School Choice' Plan Lobby Legislators Hard." *Philadelphia Daily News (PA)*, December 6, 1991: 27.

[55] Roddy, Dennis B. "Specter Finds Love in GOP Panel That Once Hissed Him." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)*, January 28, 1992: B1.

[56] Shelly, Peter J. "Christian coalition leader opposes Luksik candidacy." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, July 12, 1994: B1.

[57] Buckwalter, Tim. "Is Luksik planning a run for governor?" *Lancaster New Era (PA)*, May 25, 1994: B01.

[58] Leffler, Pete and Tim Reeves. "Fortunes of PA. GOP Remain Tied to Bush." *Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA)*, August 16, 1992: A01; Bauers, Sandy. "Religious Right Sets Strategy for Gaining Power - The Focus in the Election is on GOP State Committee Seats." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, May 8, 1994: B11.

[59] Reeves, Tim. "Hafer Not Running For Office in '94 - Local GOP Candidates for Governor, Senate Breathe Sigh of Relief." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)*, January 11, 1994: A-1; Serwach, Joseph J. "Heinz will not run for Senate." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, November 6, 1993: B1.

[60] Serwach, Joseph J. "Candidates for Senate are virtually ignored // Overshadowed by gubernatorial race." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, May 2, 1994: 9.

[61] Roddy, Dennis B. "At Home in the Middle of the Road Specter, Santorum Resist the GOP's Far Right Pressure." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)*, November 13, 1994: A-18.

[62] Connolly, Sean. "Specter taking a look at '96 presidential bid - Says GOP should broaden base." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, November 5, 1994: B1.

The Tea Party movement lacked the turbulence in Pennsylvania that it may have caused in other states, but Pennsylvania Republicans– from the elites down to the electorate– had already undergone significant change in the 2004, 2006, and 2008 elections. Senator Rick Santorum drew the ire of the conservative faction of the party by continuing to support the moderate Arlen Specter instead of endorsing conservative Club for Growth-linked Pat Toomey in the 2004 Republican Senate primary.[63] Because Specter won the primary over Toomey by less than 17,000 votes, Santorum's support of Specter was considered decisive and a lost opportunity for conservatives.[64] Moderates had already been alienated by Santorum's socially conservative agenda, and so in 2006 Santorum lost the Senate seat by over seventeen percentage points to Democrat Bob Casey Jr..[65] Finally, the competitiveness of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary spurred Republicans into switching parties to participate in Pennsylvania's closed primary. In 2008 alone, 239,000 voters changed their affiliation from Republican to Democrat, many of which are estimated to have been moderate Republicans in previous years.[66] Statewide, Democrats had over one million more registered voters than Republicans by the end of the decade.[67]

After Toomey's slim Senate primary defeat in 2004, he again emerged as an early challenger to Specter in the 2010 Senate primary election.[68] Specter, in response, unexpectedly changed parties to run as a Democrat.[69] Specter's switch was electorally motivated: given Pennsylvania's closed primaries and the exodus of Pennsylvania moderates from the Republican party, Specter's campaign believed the easiest path to reelection would be to challenge the Republican candidate in a general election with moderate and independent support.[70] Specter's vote in favor of the Democratic-led Recovery Act was the final straw for conservative Republicans; Toomey cited the vote as the impetus for challenging Specter once again for the Senate seat.[71] In addition to the extant conservative wing of the Pennsylvania turning on Specter, early Tea Party rallies in the state also identified Specter's supporting vote of the Recovery Act as an impetus for public protest.[72]

Specter's decision to switch parties in April of 2009 left the state party scrambling to line up a candidate. Toomey's extremely conservative ideology was believed by the party to be

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[63] Goldstein, Steve and Carrie Budoff. "Senator is a force, a target - Santorum emerging as the face of Senate Republicans High-profile battles are the norm for Santorum." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, December 9, 2004: A01.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Fitzgerald, Thomas and Amy Worden. "Is Pennsylvania becoming true blue? - As moderates are repelled by extreme voices in the GOP, the swing is in a strong arc toward the Democratic Party." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, November 13, 2006: B01.

[66] "Toomey Looks To Renew '04 Magic." *Lancaster New Era (PA)*, April 16, 2009: A10.

[67] Fitzgerald, Thomas. "GOP's increasing conservatism could hurt Specter." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, March 15, 2009: A01.

[68] Wereschagin, Mike. "Toomey quits job to prepare for Senate bid." *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (PA)*, April 13, 2009.

[69] "Will state GOP get Ridge to run? Oddly, Sen. Arlen Specter's defection from the Republicans could open an opportunity for the party to become moderate." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, April 30, 2009: A01.

[70] Infield, Tom. "Political parties have changed since 2002." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, April 26, 2010: A01; Fitzgerald, Thomas. "Specter haunted by Republican past." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, May 16, 2010: A01.

[71] Drobnyk, Josh. "Toomey may race Specter for Senate: He thinks fellow Republican will be scorned for his vote on stimulus bill." *Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA)*, March 3, 2009: A5.

[72] Murphy, Jan. "Big-Government Protest." Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA), March 8, 2009: B01.

unelectable.[73] The Pennsylvania GOP would often spend the year prior to elections vetting candidates and crowding out unfavorable competition. The chairman of the state GOP, Rob Gleason, openly sought multiple moderate candidates to run in the primary against Toomey, including former moderate governor Tom Ridge.[74] After over a month of unsuccessful candidate recruitment, however, Gleason and the rest of the Pennsylvania GOP gave up the search and begrudgingly accepted Toomey as the party's candidate.[75]

In the other largest race in Pennsylvania's 2010 elections, state legislator Sam Rohrer declared his candidacy for governor in November of 2009 and sought to become the loudest voice of the Tea Party among Pennsylvania Republicans.[76] In January of 2010, however, Gleason declared that the more moderate Attorney General Tom Corbett was to be the party' nominee– six weeks before the state party would meet to decide on issuing formal endorsements to candidates.[77] In protest, Rohrer hosted a meeting in the next conference room over from the state GOP's endorsement meeting.[78] An effort was made by state committee members amenable to the Tea Party to cancel all party endorsements and allow the primary to sort out candidates more organically, but the measure was easily defeated.[79] Corbett received the party's endorsement for governor, and Toomey received the endorsement for the U.S. Senate seat.[80]

One week after officially endorsing Toomey and Corbett, the state GOP co-hosted a Tea Party forum with around twenty local and national organizations in attendance.[81] Gleason spoke first and emphasized the similarities between the Tea Party's and the state party's goals.[82] Corbett, Toomey, and Rohrer also participated in the forum despite the endorsement meeting squabble a week prior.[83] To the chagrin of the state GOP, the Tea Party candidate Rohrer remained in the primary race. For months until the primary election, which Corbett would win handily, the state GOP directly attacked Rohrer for parts of his career in the state legislature to undermine his candidacy.[84]

The extent of the Tea Party movement in 2010 peaked with Toomey's election as a U.S. senator and Corbett's election as governor. In contrast to outcroppings of grassroots support and anti-incumbency flare-ups in other states, Pennsylvania had 28 challengers to incumbents across

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[73] Vecsey, Laura. "Toomey's resume: Right? Or far right?" *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, September 9, 2010: A05.

[74] Fitzgerald, Thomas. "Moderate Pa. Republicans warming to Toomey." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, May 24, 2009: A03.

[75] Ibid.

[76] O'Toole, James. "Rep. Rohrer announces candidacy for governor." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)*, November 18, 2009.

[77] "Citizens want true GOP primary." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, January 22, 2010: A17.

[78] Brennan, Chris. "Tea Party left holding the bag?" *Philadelphia Daily News (PA)*, February 12, 2010: 08.

[79] Ferris, Kevin. "Back Channels: In Pa., common ground for tea parties, GOP." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, February 21, 2010: C05.

[80] Micek, John L. and Colby Itkowitz. "GOP endorses Corbett, Toomey: Despite being heavy favorites, both will face contested primaries for governor, Senate." *Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA)*, February 14, 2010: A7.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Hegedus, Beth. "Boston had a tea party -- why not Philadelphia?" *Philadelphia Examiner (PA)*, February 21, 2010.

[83] Ferris, Kevin. "Back Channels: In Pa., common ground for tea parties, GOP." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, February 21, 2010: C05.

[84] Bumsted, Brad. "Pennsylvania GOP blasts Rohrer for missing House votes." *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (PA)*, May 7, 2010.

both chambers of its state legislature,[85] but only one incumbent lost (albeit to a challenger with Tea Party support).[86] As seen with the party in the 2000s, any "purge" of the Pennsylvania GOP had arguably begun years prior to the Tea Party movement, making the exact magnitude of Tea Party influence within the state party during the 2010s unclear. Even before the Tea Party began organizing, the increasingly unpopular moderate Republican Specter was being threatened by Toomey and the conservative bloc of the state party. The Tea Party also failed to nominate Sam Rohrer as its figurehead candidate. The greatest claim to Tea Party victory was the state GOP's immediate desire to co-opt the Tea Party label for its top candidates, Toomey and Corbett (although only Toomey would retain a Tea Party label in subsequent elections).

Subsequent elections further demonstrated the intraparty clash between the shrinking moderate faction and the conservative faction of the Republican Party of Pennsylvania. In 2012, Governor Corbett attempted to assume the role of kingmaker by pushing his own slate of endorsements to the state party and personally reaching out to individual party committee members for their support.[87] The state party acquiesced to Corbett's slate despite calls from conservative grassroots members for no endorsements in the crowded Senate primary field;[88] however, Corbett's choice for Senate finished an embarrassing third in the primary election vote.[89] Sam Rohrer placed second as the candidate with the most Tea Party support, and the primary winner was self-funded candidate Tom Smith, who ran a confusing campaign with mixed moderate and Tea Party credentials.[90]

The 2014 election cycle was quieter. Tom Corbett received a unanimous endorsement from the state party to run for reelection as governor,[91] and his lone opponent was disqualified[92] after state party committee members sued the candidate for failing to file financial documents with the state.[93] Across both the 2012 and 2014 election cycles, there are several instances of Tea Party candidates challenging incumbents. However, only in one race– the state's 79th House district race in 2012– was the challenger successful.[94] Across all elections since 2006, the party's most consistent force was the chair, Rob Gleason. While loyal to a selection of moderate candidates and an adherence to the party nomination process, Gleason's encouragement of a big

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[85] Murphy, Jan. "Incumbents' success stuns some pundits - Resources and recognition helped all but one of the state lawmakers seeking re- election win nomination, experts say." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, May 20, 2010: A01.

[86] Lester, Patrick. "Simmons ahead in 131st state House race **Democrat Mike Horton was preparing to concede to GOP candidate with tea party support." *Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA)*, November 3, 2010: A9.

[87] McNulty, Timothy. "GOP Field Unwieldy for U.S. Senate Contest - Committee May Make No Endorsement." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)*, January 22, 2012: B-1.

[88] Roebuck, Jeremy. "Corbett's slate exposes GOP rift - Malvern's Steve Welch won endorsement in the U.S. Senate race but may face in-party opposition." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, January 29, 2012: A01.

[89] Infield, Tom. "Smith wins GOP Senate nod." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, April 25, 2012.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Williams, Damon. "Republican Party of Pennsylvania Endorses Gov. Tom Corbett's Reelection." *Philadelphia Examiner (PA)*, February 3, 2014.

[92] Jackson, Peter. "Guzzardi ordered off GOP governor's primary ballot." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, May 1, 2014.

[93] Esack, Steve. "State GOP seeks to knock Guzzardi off primary ballot." *Morning Call, The (Allentown, PA)*, April 3, 2014: A9.

[94] Vickers, Robert J. "The end of moderates?" *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, April 29, 2012: A01.

tent within the party also necessarily included Tea Party conservatives that eventually gave them a larger sphere of influence in the formal party framework.[95]

The Pennsylvania GOP's complicated relationship with Donald Trump

Interest in participating in Pennsylvania's closed primary, combined with the crowded presidential race, continued the trend of an ever-changing electorate in the state. From January 1st through March of 2016, 128,000 voters changed their registration to Republican and the party registered over 55,000 new voters.[96] Pennsylvania's large delegation naturally drew interest from candidates, even though the vast majority of the state GOP's delegates are unbound to any candidate regardless of primary election results. Ted Cruz, in particular, spent weeks before the primary soliciting delegate support in hopes that the delegates would vote for him at the RNC– regardless of if he secured the most votes in the primary.[97] Both the Cruz and Trump campaigns also telephoned delegate candidates seeking pledges of support, and published slates of their loyal delegate candidates to primary voters.[98]

If there was a pro-Trump faction at work in the state GOP, a combination of the late timing of Pennsylvania's primary in presidential election years and the circumstances of the presidential primary make detecting such a presence difficult. By the April 26 state primary, Cruz and Kasich were mathematically eliminated from becoming the GOP nominee, so they joined forces to stall or prevent Trump from securing the nomination.[99] Trump nonetheless swept every county in Pennsylvania and picked up all 17 at-large state delegates that were bound to the primary winner.[100] Despite Cruz's strategy to seek out favorable delegates, all but one of the 54 unbound delegates voted for Trump at the RNC.[101] The lone delegate casting a symbolic vote for Ted Cruz would be subject to public criticism from his county party for years afterward.[102]

Trump would win the state in the general election by less than 45,000 votes. Conservative Pat Toomey, who distanced himself from Trump,[103] won reelection for the U.S. Senate by more than 40,000 votes than votes for Trump. Republicans also gained three seats in the state senate to attain their strongest majority since 1950 and two seats in the state house, its strongest majority since 1958. After this resounding success for the Pennsylvania GOP, chair Rob Gleason– at the

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[95] Zito, Salena. "Architect of Pennsylvania GOP victories keeps sleeves rolled up." *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review (PA)*, January 18, 2011.
[96] McCabe, Caitlin and Chris Palmer. "At least 180K join GOP as Pa. primary nears." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, March 29, 2016: A01.
[97] Zito, Salena. "Winning GOP delegates' hearts & minds." *Tribune-Review (Greensburg, PA)*, April 9, 2016.
[98] Levy, Marc. "Pennsylvania GOP presidential delegate chase adds to mystery." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, April 21, 2016.
[99] Fitzgerald, Thomas. "Joint move by Trump's two rivals?" *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, April 25, 2016: A04.
[100] "The Latest: Trump to add at least half the delegates Tuesday." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, April 27, 2016.
[101] Levy, Marc. "Pennsylvania RNC delegates see Trump aiming for swing voters." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, July 22, 2016.
[102] Walker, Carter. "RCLC pushes back against Doug Brubaker with attack ad of their own." *LNP (Lancaster, PA)*, May 14, 2019.
[103] Levy, Marc. "Pennsylvania GOP crosses Trump divide from 2016 to 2018." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, October 7, 2017.

time, the longest-serving state party chairman in the country– retired in early 2017.[104] Lawrence Tabas and Val DiGiorgio emerged as candidates to succeed Gleason.[105] Both had prior party leadership experience: Tabas had served as the general counsel to the state party since 2006, while DiGiorgio was the chair of Chester County (the state's seventh most populous county).[106]

The 2017 chair race hinged on support for Trump and the extent to which each candidate wanted to change the party. Outgoing chair Gleason was early to acknowledge Trump as a Republican presidential candidate and claimed some credit for delivering the state to Trump in the general election.[107] Tabas, like Gleason, was a self-claimed early supporter of Trump and was endorsed by Gleason to become the next chair.[108] DiGiorgio (originally a Rubio supporter before switching to Trump)[109] had closer ties to establishment Republican politicians in Pennsylvania and was endorsed by Toomey.[110] DiGiorgio ran as an outsider of sorts, claiming that the state party leaders were disconnected from the rest of the party,[111] and cited the Republicans' failure to win any statewide positions in 2016 as a serious issue.[112] DiGiorgio won the chair election in February of 2017 by just two votes, 173 votes to Tabas' 171.[113]

Under DiGiorgio, the Pennsylvania GOP worked with its county parties to capitalize on the influx of new and crossover voters choosing Trump in 2016.[114] The state and county party levels targeted these voters and encouraged them to volunteer and run for the state party committee.[115] One county directly linked themselves to national politics by including Trump on flyers and signage for county-level Republicans.[116]

In 2018, gubernatorial candidate Scott Wagner and U.S. Senate candidate Lou Barletta were both early, outspoken supporters of Trump in 2016. Wagner and Barletta won the state GOP's endorsement in February of 2018,[117] although other gubernatorial candidates and some committee members called for no endorsements.[118] Trump had encouraged Barletta to run for

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[104] Brennan, Chris. "Intramural fights may mar annual Pa. party." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, December 5, 2016: B01.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ferris, Kevin. "Ferris: A strong finish for Pa.'s Republican Party leader." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, January 27, 2017: A12.
[108] Sutor, Dave. "State GOP chief's term ending, but influence remains." *New Castle News (PA)*, February 3, 2017.
[109] Brennan, Chris. "Pa. GOP chair looks forward and back Valentine F. DiGiorgio III talks of Trump, Turzai, and what he sees as Democratic opportunism." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, June 10, 2017: B01.
[110] Zwick, Kevin. "GOP irked party chair candidate testified for Dem." *Tribune-Review (Greensburg, PA)*, February 2, 2017.
[111] "Pennsylvania GOP eyes Southeast in quest for domination." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, February 1, 2017.
[112] Brennan, Chris. "Intramural fights may mar annual Pa. party." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, December 5, 2016: B01.
[113] Zwick, Kevin. "Chester County leader will helm Pa. Republicans." *Tribune-Review (Greensburg, PA)*, February 4, 2017.
[114] "State GOP chairman: Party has plan to keep Trump voters." *Erie Times-News (PA)*, May 5, 2017.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Levy, Marc. "Pennsylvania Democrats see anti-Trump zeal in election wins." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, November 8, 2017.
[117] "Pennsylvania GOP endorses candidates identified with Trump." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, February 10, 2018.
[118] Baer, John. "To endorse or not is GOP issue: An update on GOP governor's run." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, February 5, 2018: B01.

office in the first place,[119] and Wagner was in direct contact with Steve Bannon, who appeared to run Wagner's campaign to some extent.[120] Trump endorsed both candidates,[121] although each lost their respective elections by double digits. In addition to the reelection of Governor Tom Wolf and Senator Bob Casey Jr., Democrats gained three U.S. House seats, five state senate seats, and eleven state house seats in the 2018 election. In the wake of the string of Republican losses, DiGiorgio emphasized "getting back to our roots" and appealing to suburban voters–[122] but also met with Trump officials in Washington D.C. in January of 2019 to begin planning Trump's 2020 reelection campaign in the state.[123]

Throughout Trump's first term, several Pennsylvania Republicans supporting Trump in 2016 were often linked with the Trump administration. Both Gleason and DiGiorgio met with Trump during their tenures as chair of the state GOP.[124] Gleason was later appointed to a board of the U.S. Air Force by Trump.[125] Pennsylvania lobbyist David Urban was an advisor to the Trump campaign and was appointed by Trump in 2018 to become the Chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission.[126] Rep. Tom Marino co-chaired the Trump campaign in Pennsylvania and was nominated by Trump to serve as Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.[127] Senate candidate Lou Barletta served on Trump's transition team and was briefly considered for Secretary of Labor or Secretary of Transportation.[128] Finally, Pennsylvania GOP national committeewoman Christine Toretti was appointed by Trump as an ambassador twice– in 2018 and 2025.[129]

Pennsylvania GOP chair Val DiGiorgio resigned in June of 2019 amid a sexual harassment scandal.[130] After losing the previous chair election to DiGiorgio by two votes, Lawrence Tabas emerged as a candidate to succeed DiGiorgio. Former chairman Rob Gleason

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[119] Murphy, Jan. "GOP hopefuls await Barletta announcement." *Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA)*, August 17, 2017: A06.

[120] Wereschagin, Mike and Sam Janesch. "Republican candidates seeking to unseat Gov. Tom Wolf in 2018 must decide how closely to align themselves with Donald Trump." *LNP (Lancaster, PA)*, October 23, 2017.

[121] "Trump endorses Barletta for Senate." *Citizen's Voice, The & Sunday Voice (Wilkes-Barre, PA)*, February 12, 2018; "Pennsylvania GOP endorses candidates identified with Trump." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, February 10, 2018.

[122] O'Boyle, Bill. "Pa. GOP boss: Republican Party has to get back to its roots." *Times Leader, The (Wilkes-Barre, PA)*, January 18, 2019.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ferris, Kevin. "Ferris: A strong finish for Pa.'s Republican Party leader." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, January 27, 2017: A12.

[125] Sutor, Dave. "Former Pa. GOP chief Gleason named to post at Air Force Academy." *The Tribune-Democrat*. July 25, 2018.

[126] "Edward M. Kennedy Institute Welcomes David Urban to Board of Directors." The Edward M. Kennedy Institute. February 11, 2025.

[127] Thomas, Ken. "Trump taps Pennsylvania congressman to be drug czar." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, September 2, 2017.

[128] "Trump endorses Barletta for Senate." *Citizen's Voice, The & Sunday Voice (Wilkes-Barre, PA)*, February 12, 2018.

[129] Woynicz, Kieran. "Toretti gets another shot at foreign service as Trump envoy to Sweden." *Leader Times (Kittanning, PA)*, January 14, 2025.

[130] Seidman, Andrew. "Trump allies join fray on Pa. GOP chief - His son and campaign manager weigh in as the party prepares to pick a successor to DiGiorgio." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, July 5, 2019: B1.

endorsed Tabas again, and Tabas ran with support from Pennsylvania rank-and-file members.[131] Another candidate ran with several endorsements from national Trump officials.[132] Before the chair election took place, a compromise for the sake of party unity was struck, electing Tabas as chair and the other candidate as vice chair.[133]

Despite the deal, which was acknowledged and supported by Trump himself at the time, the Trump campaign severed ties with the Pennsylvania GOP in February 2020.[134] The split included the Trump campaign moving out of the state GOP's headquarters and limiting the relationship between the two groups to "litigation and voter contact tools".[135] Unnamed GOP operatives speculated that in addition to concerns about the state GOP's fundraising efforts and the slate of delegates that would attend the RNC, the Trump campaign resented Tabas becoming the chair of the party instead of their preferred candidate.[136] Later that year, Trump lost Pennsylvania in the presidential election by about 80,000 votes. Despite the loss, much of the state party's actions in 2021 were in continued affirmation of Trump. When Senator Toomey voted to convict Trump in the wake of the events that transpired on January 6th, 2021, the state party and several county parties rebuked Toomey and doubled down in support of Trump.[137] Additionally, a crowded field for the upcoming gubernatorial and Toomey's soon-to-be vacant Senate seat formed, with several candidates attempting to run as a Trump surrogate.[138]

For the first time since 1978, the Pennsylvania GOP declined to endorse in the 2022 gubernatorial, lieutenant gubernatorial, and U.S. Senate races.[139] The failure of establishment Republican candidates to coalesce behind a preferred candidate in time allowed Doug Mastriano, an ardent Trump supporter and election denier, to command polls and ultimately clinch the Republican gubernatorial primary election.[140] Furthermore, Mehmet Oz won the Republican senatorial primary by less than one thousand votes, in large part due to a self-funded campaign and a reliance on an endorsement from Trump.[141] Republicans went on to suffer several bad losses in the general election: in a midterm year for the Biden administration, Democrats won the open gubernatorial election, an open U.S. Senate seat, a majority of the U.S. House delegation, and control of the state house.

In the aftermath of the immense Democratic gains in 2022, Pennsylvania Republicans became divided on attributing blame. Some claimed that Trump centralized Pennsylvania

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131 Levy, Marc. "Pennsylvania GOP settles fight over contested race for chair." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, July 13, 2019.

132 Seidman, Andrew. "Trump allies join fray on Pa. GOP chief - His son and campaign manager weigh in as the party prepares to pick a successor to DiGiorgio." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, July 5, 2019: B1.

133 Levy, Marc. "Pennsylvania GOP settles fight over contested race for chair." *Associated Press State Wire: Pennsylvania (PA)*, July 13, 2019.

134 Brennan, Chris. "In Pa., Trump swings for the fence-sitters." *Philadelphia Daily News (PA)*, May 15, 2020: 9.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 Erdley, Deb. "County fault lines in Western Pennsylvania mirror fault lines as GOP attempts to adjust in the post-Trump era." *Tribune-Review (Greensburg, PA)*, February 16, 2021.

138 Thornburgh, David. "End primary extremism by letting independents vote." *Times-Tribune, The (Scranton, PA)*, April 12, 2022.

139 Tamari, Jonathan. "GOP won't endorse in big primaries." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, February 6, 2022: B1.

140 Seidman, Andrew. "Mastriano proved to be unstoppable - Before trying to thwart his bid, Republicans followed the state senator's lead on conspiracy theories." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, May 19, 2022: A8.

141 Tamari, Jonathan. "Trump to stump for Oz Friday." *Philadelphia Inquirer, The (PA)*, May 6, 2022: B3.

elections around himself and his endorsed candidates, who were much too extreme to attract moderate or independent support in a general election.[142] Others faulted Tabas and the state party committee for not endorsing or otherwise narrowing the field earlier in the primary process.[143] The deference shown by state party leadership to candidates is a far cry from the state GOP of years past, who would often unofficially select a candidate in the year prior to a primary election.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Republican Party of Pennsylvania is similar to several state parties in the dissertation that shifted priorities to a national focus in recent years. A recounting of the state party's history since the Christian Right movement reveals the surprising role of Pennsylvania's moderates on either side of the political aisle in delaying Republican intraparty conflict, from Democrat Bob Casey Sr.'s pro-life position muddling the waters for evangelical Pennsylvanians to Republican Arlen Specter's increasingly unwelcome efforts to maintain a moderate wing within the state GOP. Only in the last decade has the state Republican party transformed into a monolithic conservative institution, one whose members compete amongst each other to demonstrate loyalty to Donald Trump and pro-Trump Republicanism.

In this chapter, I argued that institutional features of the Pennsylvania GOP, like its leadership committee and pre-primary endorsements, kept it insulated from grassroots movements and national Republican trends for many years. However, the state party lost influence with the emergence of outsider organizations and became increasingly hostile to a large portion of its remaining members– moderates, and anyone else not in lockstep with the conservatism found within the state party's leadership. Left without much purpose, the Pennsylvania GOP jumped on the Donald Trump bandwagon after Trump's surprise victory in the state and molded itself in Trump's, and the RNC's, image. On the other hand, the narrowness of Trump's victory in 2016 and loss of the state in 2020 may indicate that the state party's overcommitted to its total rebrand of its officers and candidates for office in favor of Trump.

For multiple decades, many of the Pennsylvania GOP's features helped insulate itself from potential insurgent movements, lending support to the state party hypothesis introduced in this dissertation. Evidence for the state-level institutions hypothesis, on the other hand, is inconclusive. For example, I described how many of Pennsylvania's Republican elected officials were quick to align themselves with Trump and his administration, leaving the state party in the lurch. I suspect that the absence of linkages between the state party and Republican leaders in elected offices spurred the state party to emulate the national-level, pro-Trump Republicanism that I have described in this chapter, although I can draw no definitive conclusion in support or refutation of the hypothesis. Finally, the party competition hypothesis finds support in the case of the Pennsylvania GOP: for many years, the state's two-party competition had kept moderates from either party at the fore of statewide elections. Conspicuously, a string of dominant Democratic victories in the 2010s were a prelude to the state party's subsequent transformation towards Trump, suggesting the possibility that it was easier for pro-Trump Republicanism to take over the state party only after slews of Republican losses at the ballot.

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[142] Tamari, By Jonathan. "The Pa. GOP's no good, very bad, terrible election." *Philadelphia Daily News (PA)*, November 13, 2022: 4.
[143] Ibid.

The Republican Party of Pennsylvania is a clear case where it has become both nationalized and polarized over time. The closed primaries of Pennsylvania and the state GOP's leadership have created a more uniformly conservative base with less room for moderates that previously flourished within the party apparatus. Party leadership has become less about the institution and more about the ideological agenda being promoted, and virtually all of Pennsylvania's Republican candidates have echoed Trump's brand of conservatism. The 2016 presidential election was a crucial inflection point. In the days following Trump's election, the Pennsylvania GOP chose to curry favor with the president, signaling an openness to follow both Trump and the Republican National Committee. Instead of focusing on rebranding Pennsylvania Republicanism or recruiting competitive candidates for statewide office, the state party handed itself over to the RNC and echoes the national Republican narratives and platform.

The future of Pennsylvania's Republican party is clear: once the state party aligned itself with Trump and the RNC, it would seem nearly impossible for the state party to regain its own identity and strength. Normatively, the party's future is mixed. On the one hand, the party has found a new purpose after years of irrelevance in the early 2010s and has become nationally relevant as a heavily pro-Trump state party in a competitive swing state. In contrast, the party's current identity is a remnant of its former self, which was able to accommodate multiple factions within its party and add to its institutional influence. Moderates– and any remaining Republican voters who do not support Trump– may be left without favorable Republican candidates for the foreseeable future.

Chapter 4: Republican Party of Kentucky

Introduction

The Republican Party of Kentucky was selected as one of two Southern case studies in the dissertation. At the outset, I had judged the Kentucky GOP to be "Low" in intraparty conflict in the Christian Right and Trump eras, but "High" in the Tea Party era. Like most of the South, Kentucky's elected offices tend to be dominated by Republicans over the past few decades– although Kentucky's electorate deviates from the norm by electing the Democratic candidate in four of the state's last five gubernatorial elections. The Kentucky GOP has encountered the Christian Right, the Tea Party, and the rise of pro-Donald Trump Republicanism in its history. In each instance, however, the state party has been able to avoid being swamped by intraparty conflict. In this chapter, I argue that the success record of the state party, institutional factors of the state and the party, and the leadership of the party's helmsman, U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell, may all contribute to a Republican state party that to this point has remained resistant to the national-level Republican movements that have affected most state Republican parties. After studying the Kentucky GOP in-depth, I would now argue that the party experienced "Low" levels of intraparty conflict across all eras of interest—with the notable exception of Rand Paul's election in 2010—as I will explain in this chapter.

Despite McConnell's first Senate term beginning in 1984, it wasn't until 2000 that Kentucky Republicans were able to break unified Democratic control of the state. Since then, the Kentucky GOP has made incremental gains each year, culminating in a supermajority for Republicans in both chambers of the state legislature today. Leadership of the state party has remained consistent: only two chairs served the party in the period from 2007 to 2023, a period that encapsulates both the Tea Party movement and the first Trump administration. The Republican Party of Kentucky has done well in recruiting and promoting conservative Republican candidates up and down the ballot, from the delegation to the U.S. House and the state legislature down to county- and local-level offices. The remarkable durability of the state GOP's leadership, coupled with the party's successful track record of winning elections for conservatives, leaves few cracks for potential party factions to expose.

Myriad institutional features of the state GOP and the state itself appear to– intentionally or otherwise– bolster and protect the Kentucky Republican establishment leadership. For example, Kentucky state law delineates a unique election cycle schedule: gubernatorial (and other statewide) elections are held the year prior to presidential years, and the state holds no elections the year after presidential years. The ability for an outsider, national group to sustain itself over multiple years is thus severely blunted. Next, Kentucky's election code and the governing documents of the Kentucky GOP help create a party network that is deferential to the state level, removing potential opportunities from upstart groups attempting to gain influence via the grassroots. The leadership positions of the state party also heavily favor current and former elected officials, creating a massive buffer against short-term turbulence. Finally, Kentucky GOP officers serve for four-year terms and until 2019 were elected in presidential election years; therefore, it would be impossible for the Tea Party movement in 2010 (and, to a lesser extent, any pro-Trump wing of the party in early 2016) to quickly take control of the party through supplanting the party leadership. Therefore, the Kentucky GOP is among the cases in clearest

support of the state-level institutions hypothesis and the state party hypothesis posited in the dissertation.

More so than in any other state Republican party, the Kentucky GOP's successes revolve around a singular politician in Mitch McConnell. Mitch McConnell's hold on the state party renders him a kingmaker of Kentucky Republican politics. Even in failure (such as Rand Paul's successful primary victory against McConnell's handpicked candidate in 2010), McConnell has demonstrated an ability to adapt to national Republican trends while overcoming any intraparty conflict that may undermine his goal of electing Republicans to office. McConnell's 2014 primary election campaign represented the most serious attempt at disrupting the party hierarchy in Kentucky. Threatened by outsider conservative groups funding McConnell's primary opponent, Matt Bevin, McConnell treated the primary election as a proxy battle between his influence and those of groups that found success in other states, like Jim DeMint's Senate Conservatives Fund and Tea Party Patriots. McConnell's victory strengthened his influence at both the national and state level and rendered him a blockade to outside spending in Kentucky in subsequent years.

Background Information

Kentucky			
Kentucky Elections		Republican Party of Kentucky	
Primary type	Closed Caucus (2016)	**State party officer elections**	Elected by state central committee
Presidential/state primaries	Combined event	**State party officer elections schedule**	Presidential election years (-2019) Year after presidential election (2019-)
Presidential delegate allocation	Proportional	**State party convention cycle**	Even-numbered years
State election cycle	Odd-numbered years before presidential election years	**Pre-primary endorsements**	No rules allowing or banning endorsements

By multiple measures, Kentucky has one of the most conservative electorates in the United States. The last time Kentucky gave less than 56% of the vote to a Republican candidate was 1996: Bill Clinton beat Bob Dole by 13,000 votes in an election with over 120,000 votes cast for Ross Perot. A Pew survey gauging political ideology also shows that Kentucky respondents identify as conservative at similar rates as other Southern states.[1] A significant contributor to Kentucky's conservative electorate may be its evangelical Protestants, who make

[1] "2023-24 U.S. Religious Landscape Study Interactive Database". *Pew Research Center*. 2025.

up almost one-third of Kentucky's population.[2] Kentucky's party registration, on the other hand, has yet to resemble the ideological shift during party realignment: as recently as 2022, Democrats make up 45.7 percent of voter registrations compared to Republicans at 44.7 percent.[3] Kentucky is notable for its very low number of independent voters, owing at least in part to its closed primaries. Using the same Pew survey data mentioned previously, only South Dakota has a lower proportion of respondents reporting no partisan affiliation. Voter registration records indicate an uptick in voters falling into the "other, unaffiliated, and independent" category of registration–3.2 percent in 1978, 6.4 percent in 2002, and 9.5 percent in 2022–[4]although the numbers remain low relative to many other states.

Kentucky's electoral history is marked by long periods of Democratic dominance, typical for the region throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Democrats held unified control of Kentucky's seven statewide executive positions in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Democratic dominance in Kentucky's state legislature waned throughout the 1980s and 1990s: seats in the Kentucky General Assembly continually flipped to Republicans until the state senate became controlled by Republicans in 2000. Surprisingly, Democrats managed to hold control of the state house for nearly a century until 2016, when Republicans flipped seventeen out of a hundred seats. Republican domination of the state has continued since. Despite the widespread conservatism among the electorate and Kentucky's elected officials, Kentucky has nonetheless elected multiple Democratic governors in recent years. Explanations for this seemingly paradoxical phenomenon include the quality of the gubernatorial candidates from each party, the state Democratic Party focusing almost exclusively on the gubernatorial election, and the timing of Kentucky's gubernatorial election cycle, which occurs in the year before a presidential election. Democratic governors Steve and Andy Beshear may stand to benefit the most from this unusual schedule, allowing them to run their own state-based campaigns and to avoid strong associations with national Democratic candidates and policies.

Prior political science research and descriptive data appear to closely track Kentucky's political development over the past few decades. Like many Southern states, Elazar categorizes Kentucky as having a traditionalistic political culture wherein the individual citizen is particularly wary of government overreach, which Elazar asserts traces back to slavery and the Civil War.[5] Mayhew assigns Kentucky a TPO score of 4 out of 5, citing its reliance on patronage and extensive "factional organizations".[6] As already alluded to, Mitch McConnell's influence on the state GOP cannot be understated, as Gibson et al. (1983) demonstrate quantitatively: in the years prior to McConnell's 1984 election, the Kentucky GOP was considered in the bottom quartile of state parties in terms of organizational strength, while the Kentucky Democratic Party was in the top quartile.[7] Without any updates to Gibson et al.'s (1983) data, I may only assert that the organizational strength of Kentucky's two state parties have entirely flipped, as indicated frequently throughout this chapter.

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[2] Grammich, Clifford A., Erica Dollhopf, Mary Gautier, Richard Houseal, Dale E. Jones, Alexei Krindatch, Richie Stanley, and Scott Thumma. "2020 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Adherents Study". *Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies*. 2022.

[3] "Registration Statistics". State Board of Elections, Commonwealth of Kentucky.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Elazar, Daniel Judah. "American federalism: A view from the states." 1966.

[6] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986.

[7] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.

Election and primary laws

Kentucky's Revised Statutes references state executive committees and state party chairs but does not govern their structure. State executive committees have the right to allocate delegate votes however they want (be it a primary, caucus, or some combination of the two), and can allocate delegates between candidates in a couple of different ways. The state of Kentucky provides funding for primary elections, yet it relinquishes the choice of primary or caucus to each political party. Both major parties nonetheless almost always opt into using the state-funded primary system, with very few exceptions. In 1984, for example, both parties opted out of the primary: Kentucky Democrats switched to a caucus to choose Walter Mondale, and Kentucky Republicans simply chose to allocate their delegates to incumbent Ronald Reagan at their state convention. Since then, the only caucus held in Kentucky was in 2016 by Republicans, a controversial process that will be discussed in greater detail.

Campaign finance laws in Kentucky set up the state parties to wield influence in elections. Kentucky prohibits corporations and unions from contributing directly to candidates. Low contribution limits by PACs to individual campaigns likely incentivizes them to pursue avenues of influence in other ways. In contrast to corporations, unions, and PACs, however, Kentucky state parties can spend unlimited amounts of money on their own candidates. Therefore, the easiest way to facilitate money to candidates would be through cooperation with the state parties.

In 1992, Kentucky allowed governors to run for a second term. Kentucky governors may only serve for two consecutive four-year terms, but can theoretically run for gubernatorial office again after a four-year break. Meanwhile, there are no term limits for Kentucky legislators. Kentucky law also prohibits any candidate from appearing more than once on an election ballot. This came to a head when Rand Paul ran for both reelection to the Senate and for president in 2016, but may similarly affect any Kentucky politician looking to be elected to higher office.

Written into the state constitution in 1891, Kentucky holds off-year elections for their gubernatorial and statewide offices. Only five states hold their gubernatorial elections in off-years, and Mississippi and Louisiana are the only ones aside from Kentucky holding them in the year prior to a presidential election year. Additionally, Kentucky holds no elections the year after a presidential election as per its state constitution. This rule applies everywhere across the state: the Kentucky General Assembly, the state judicial system, local school board districts, county officers, and city officers. Efforts to align the cycle with the national pattern occur during each legislative session, but the primary argument against any change– to prevent voter fatigue– is apparently a strong enough deterrent for any proposed change to materialize.

Party rules and bylaws

Static features

The Republican Party of Kentucky follows a tripartite structure typical of other state parties. The organization is run by a combination of a party chair, a large committee of party

members (the Republican State Central Committee, or RSCC), and a small committee (the State Executive Committee). Neither Kentucky's constitution nor Kentucky state law provide organizational rules that political parties must adhere to. A party's state central committee and its executive committee are referenced by name in Kentucky's laws, but never defined, giving political parties the latitude to lay out their own organizational structure. Almost all mentions of the party committees in state law are in deference to the state party or its subsidiary levels, granting parties their choice of primary method, how to allocate their delegates, and how to fill any applicable vacancies in office.

Leadership of the state party is elected by the central committee, in contrast to other state parties whose officers are elected by delegates at a state convention. There are two features that together make the Kentucky GOP stand out amongst its contemporaries. First, all officers of the party are elected by slates of candidates. Slates include candidates for chair, vice chair, secretary, and youth chair, and a separate slate to elect the at-large members of the central committee. All slates must be ratified by majority rule of the central committee. Second, the slates are nominated and offered to the central committee by the Nominating Committee, whose membership is the entire executive committee. In the event a slate of candidates is rejected by the central committee, the executive committee offers a new slate. This process continues indefinitely until a slate is voted in.

In contrast to other state parties that may carefully define the roles and responsibilities of their officers, the Republican Party of Kentucky grants its chair broad authority to carry out the mission of the party, which is not defined in its rules or bylaws. The chair is given "all necessary and implied powers" to carry out their duties. According to the bylaws, powers include establishing the vision/plan of the party, controlling all personnel, creating and appointing any special committees, presiding over all party meetings, and carrying out the mandate of the rules. The chair is elected to four-year terms with no term limits, and the chair (as well as any statewide elected officer) may only be removed by the executive committee by a two-thirds vote.

Membership of the state party's central committee skews toward establishment Republicans and Republicans who have served in elective office. Approximately three hundred memberships of the central committee are explicitly allocated based on elections to positions across various levels of the Kentucky GOP: county officers, district officers, and so on. However, upwards of two hundred memberships are granted to elected officials in various capacities. For example, all Republican members of the Kentucky General Assembly are members of the central committee– 111 as of 2024. Furthermore, all past and present Kentucky Governors, U.S. Senators, and U.S. House members are given membership, which realistically amounts to ten or so additional members. Therefore, the growth and electoral success of the Republican party in Kentucky over the past few decades has caused establishment Republican representation to balloon in the central committee: as late as the 1990s, there were approximately 75 less members of the central committee due to how committee memberships are granted than there are now. The large number of elected officials serving in party positions represents a significant barrier to potential factions looking to gain influence within the party.

The executive committee is less flexibly defined than the central committee: set at 56 members for over a decade, it has never deviated significantly from this number. In contrast to the central committee, which lends itself heavily to the county level, executive committee membership does not explicitly include county-level officers. Instead, many of the members are decided by at-large elections: eight state-at-large members chosen in the same slate election as the state officers, and 24 district-at-large members where each of the six Congressional District

Committees elect four members. Membership of each Congressional District Committee is an inner circle (consisting of officers and elected officials in that district), making party takeover via executive committee unlikely.

Other notable features of the Kentucky GOP bylaws include a loyalty provision, low quorum requirements for party business, and a complex amendment procedure. First, grounds for party officeholder removal–most of which are bureaucratic in nature, such as sustained meeting absences and neglecting payment of dues– also includes endorsing the opponent of a Republican nominee for any local, state, or national office, or failing to support the Republican presidential candidate. Second, the Kentucky GOP only requires 15% of the relevant body in attendance to conduct party business, has no minimum requirements for all other party business (such as for state conventions or precinct meetings) and doesn't allow for proxy voting at any level of the party. Finally, amendments to party rules must be approved by both the state central committee and the executive committee, each requiring a two-thirds vote of the members present. The nature of the Kentucky GOP's governing bodies as distinct stands in contrast to other state party models where the executive committee is more of a board of directors than an equal body to the central committee.

Dynamic features

I have collected twelve versions of the Republican Party of Kentucky's bylaws from 1998 to 2024. While quantifying a "change" to the bylaws is nebulous and likely inconsistent when taken individually, a rough tally of changes and alterations to the previous version of the bylaws reveals spikes in party activity. For example, from 1998 to 2008 I recorded five total edits across the four versions of the party bylaws that were updated during this time; and from 2019 to 2024, there were over thirty changes distributed across five versions of the bylaws. From 2008 to 2019, however, I note well over 150 changes across four versions– clearly the result of a significant undertaking by party members, who write and propose each edit.

The largest number of changes between two sets of bylaws occurred from 2008 to 2011. The most significant change affected the composition of the state executive committee: the number of members coming from the district level party organizations increased. Significantly, representation from these decentralized members increased from 42 to 64 percent of all executive committee members. Given that all relevant executive committee matters (aside from the removal of officers) are settled by a majority, district-level party leaders gained the potential to outvote centralized party leadership between 2008 and 2011. Changes like these were meant to appease the Tea Party movement in Kentucky:

"To help address concerns raised by Tea Party activists, the state Republican Party leadership earlier this year made some rule changes to allow the participation of more people at local and state levels. The changes were designed to get more people involved in local GOP committees and improve communications through automated telephone calls, mass mailings and emails to announce scheduled meetings where officers would be selected." [8]

In exchange for increased representation from the grassroots in 2011, however, new rules were passed concurrently that safeguarded the party from a total grassroots takeover. First, all delegates elected at any level of the party now needed to disclose their addresses and contact

[8] Brammer, Jack and Halimah Abdullah. "Tea Party: Losses by GOP not our fault Ky. Republican party needs true conservatives, it says." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, November 12, 2011: A1.

information to the state party for credentialing. Prior to this change, only someone's name was sufficient for them to be credentialed and approved as a delegate. Second, rules were added in 2011 requiring all participants in precinct and county committee elections to have been registered Republicans in Kentucky as of the date of the previous general election. Overall, Tea Party leaders in Kentucky were dissatisfied with the changes in the 2011 bylaws, as they believed the concessions made to the grassroots were insufficient.[9] While the restrictions passed in 2011 barely affected preexisting Republican voters, they were obstacles for potential new members of the party who could have otherwise been mobilized for purposes of party takeover.

The second largest number of changes between two versions occurred from 2015 to 2019. The 2019 bylaws pushed all officer elections to occur in the year after presidential elections (instead of the year of). Taken in conjunction with the aforementioned fact that there are no elections in Kentucky following a presidential election year, this change offers massive implications for party composition in the future. Any momentum spurred by popular federal candidates will lose steam after a year of election inactivity. For example, Tea Party networks investing heavily in Tea Party races in 2010 may choose not to continue their efforts for an additional year, losing any momentum they may have gained making inroads into the state's Republican electorate. Therefore, a more favorable environment to the incumbent leadership of the Kentucky GOP is created.

Intraparty Conflicts in the Republican Party of Kentucky

Social Conservatives in Kentucky in the 1990s

There are very few indicators of a wave of socially conservative Republicans affecting Kentucky politics prior to the 1990s. Kentucky Republicans voted for Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and Pat Robertson at rates similar to other states' Republican electorates. In fact, Mitch McConnell's surprise victory in 1984 over Democratic incumbent Dee Huddleston may represent the greatest effort from Christian Right groups in the state in the 1980s. Conservative leader Roger Ailes may have been a large boon to McConnell's senatorial campaign,[10] but it should also be noted that Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell distributed 200,000 letters endorsing McConnell when the margin of victory was only around five thousand votes.[11]

Attorney Larry Forgy's political transformation into a socially conservative candidate, and his subsequent failures, reveals much of the balance of power between party factions during this period. Forgy withdrew early in the race for governor in 1987, lost in the gubernatorial primary in 1991, and lost in the gubernatorial general election in 1995. In 1987, Forgy was considered the strongest Republican candidate for governor in decades; by 1991, however, local party chairs, an overwhelming majority of state legislators, and Kentucky's members of Congress had coalesced around the more mainstream U.S. Representative Larry Hopkins in the primary, causing Forgy to reach out to the most socially conservative members of the party to

[9] Ibid.

[10] York, Michael. "McConnell and Perkins Sword In." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, January 4, 1985: B2.

[11] Owen, Karen. "The Reagan era and the region conservative churches found champion in Reagan." *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer (KY)*, January 20, 1989: 1A.

keep his campaign afloat.[12] Despite receiving assistance from a few counties controlled by socially conservative Republicans,[13] Forgy still lost the primary, albeit by less than two thousand votes. Forgy leaned even more into the religious right in 1995 and clinched the Republican nomination without opposition,[14] but lost in the general election to Democrat Paul Patton (despite national trends creating significant tailwinds for Republican candidates).

The 1994 election cycle produced a few victories for the religious right in Kentucky. Lawyer and Coalitions of Christians board member Tim Philpot was chosen to fill the vacant Kentucky state senate seat in 1990 due to the death of incumbent Republican Senator Jack Trevey. Vacancies in Kentucky are filled by the relevant party level's executive committee. In this case, the Fayette County Republican Party, one of the few counties in Kentucky controlled by Robertson supporters, voted for Philpot, 24 to 22, over an establishment Republican that had been serving in the Kentucky House of Representatives for over a decade.[15] The timing of Trevey's death (and subsequent replacement by Philpot) occurred after Kentucky's primary elections, and no Democratic candidate had sought the office in 1986 or 1990. Therefore, by 1994, Philpot was essentially running for reelection as a four-year incumbent– whose entire electoral history was winning a county party's 48-member executive committee by two votes. The socially conservative Philpot would go on to win reelection by less than two thousand votes after attracting a concerted Democratic effort to defeat him.[16]

Other social conservatives, like Ron Lewis and Ernie Fletcher share similar stories of success. Lewis, like Philpot in 1990, won after the unexpected death of an incumbent– this time, a Democratic U.S. House member who had served for over forty years– and Fletcher won his Kentucky state house seat against a vulnerable one-term Democrat. All three of these candidates had overt ties to the religious right: Philpot was the son of an evangelical preacher,[17] Lewis and Fletcher were Southern Baptist ministers,[18] and Philpot and Fletcher were board members of the Coalition of Christians in Kentucky.[19] Crucially, the successes of these candidates in 1994 originate from the same place– Fayette County, the second-most populous county in the state, whose Republican party had been controlled by supporters of Pat Robertson since Robertson's presidential campaign in 1988.[20] Fayette County activist groups like Concerned Christians in Kentucky coordinated with the county party and national groups like the Christian Coalition to

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[12] Roser, Mary Ann. "Forgy, Hopkins vie for conservative vote." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, March 16, 1991: A1.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Lucke, Jamie. "It's Forgy vs. Patton Democrats Avoid Runoff." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, May 24, 1995: A1.

[15] Geiger, Bob. "GOP Picks Philpot To Replace Trevey On Ballot For Senate." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, July 17, 1990: A1.

[16] Prather, Paul and Jamie Lucke. "GOP Sweep Invigorates Campaign of Morality by Religious Right." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, November 13, 1994: A1.

[17] "Tim Philpot Pledges Tougher Prosecution." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, June 1, 1985: D2.

[18] Estep, Bill. "GOP'S 2nd District Victory Shows Role Of Money, Strategy - Natcher-style Campaign Failed Against '90s Tactics." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, May 26, 1994: A1; "Governor Ernie Fletcher." *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 102, no. 1 (2004): 3–11.

[19] Lucke, Jamie. "Christian Groups Influencing State Races." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, November 6, 1994: D1.

[20] Swansbrough, Robert H., and David Michael Brodsky. "The South's New Politics: Realignment and Dealignment." (1988).

distribute literature and mobilize voters.[21] Margaret Sori Marin spearheaded the religious right movement in Fayette County and Kentucky in 1994. In fact, Sori Marin's influence traces back to the initial Fayette County Republican Party takeover: she chaired the Fayette County Republican Party during Robertson's 1988 campaign, and intentionally placed Christians in leadership positions within the party apparatus.[22]

Miller and Jewell (1996) mention the "capture of the state [Republican] party by the Christian Right pro-life faction" in their overview of Kentucky's political system.[23] After reviewing the resources available at the time and since then, however, the evidence is more mixed. What has been described up to this point is a culmination of the efforts of one party activist and one county Republican party to achieve success in one election cycle. The larger Kentucky GOP, however, remained largely unshaken throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the face of Robertson supporters and Christian Right contingents. Previously, the bylaws of the Republican Party of Kentucky were found to reveal the extent to which Kentucky elected officials and state-level leaders dominate the party's leadership committees. In addition to institutional design keeping insurgents at arm's length, I find that three classes of political actors prevented the Christian Right from making meaningful inroads into the Kentucky GOP.

First, Kentucky Democratic candidates could be as religious as their Republican opponents, like Democratic Governor Paul Patton and Democratic U.S. House Representative Romano Mazzoli. While many political contests would pit a pro-choice candidate against a pro-life one, abortion wasn't enough of a focal point for Kentucky voters amidst a bevy of other socially conservative policies that both candidates agreed on, such as prayer in school or capital punishment. Second, the two most important Kentucky GOP leaders focused on stabilizing an emerging Republican base and winning elections. From 1986 to 1994, Chairman Robert Gable emphasized the importance of the "big tent" Republican Party.[24] Meanwhile, Mitch McConnell was already exhibiting significant influence during his first few years as a U.S. Senator. Like Gable, McConnell sought to unite the warring factions of the party. The combination of McConnell's electoral success with his efforts to work with each faction made his goal of uniting the party possible.[25] Finally, all outsider groups involved in Kentucky Republican politics were limited to local or country control. In other state contexts, outsider groups may refer to national groups or PACs spending external money on state or local races. In Kentucky, however, any influence from larger national organizations like the RNC and the Christian Coalition was carefully coordinated with their local analogs, such as the Concerned Christians or the Fayette County Republican Party, and did not work through the state GOP.[26]

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[21] Prather, Paul and Jamie Lucke. "GOP Sweep Invigorates Campaign of Morality by Religious Right." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, November 13, 1994: A1

[22] Prather, Paul. "Thunder on the religious right." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, August 7, 1994: H1.

[23] Miller, Penny M. and Malcolm E. Jewell. "Kentucky". In *State party profiles: a 50-state guide to development, organization, and resources*. (1997).

[24] "GOP Talk of Inclusion Draws Mixed Reactions." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, November 9, 1992: B2.

[25] Geiger, Bob. "Republican Mitch McConnell Makes a Habit of Winning Against the Odds." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, October 20, 1996: B1.

[26] Owen, Karen and Keith Lawrence. "Local churches not attempting to sway voters." *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer (KY)*, November 4, 1995: 1A.

Rand Paul's Tea Party capstone victory in Kentucky

Arguably the greatest success story of the Tea Party movement in 2010 occurred in Kentucky. Senator Rand Paul's decisive primary victory stupefied Kentucky establishment Republicans who had chosen their preferred candidate months prior, mainstream Republican Kentucky Secretary of State Trey Grayson. In a break from a previously-held tradition against endorsing a primary candidate, Mitch McConnell supported Grayson for months prior to the May 2010 primary.[27]

Rand Paul's campaign was defined by national, external forces. Rand Paul, boxed out of establishment support from his own state party, utilized father Ron Paul's presidential campaign fundraising techniques to accept money from across the country.[28] Paul's endorsements also skewed heavily toward national organizations like FreedomWorks[29] and Tea Party Express, or nationally known Tea Party figureheads like Sarah Palin.[30] Only two Kentucky elected officials endorsed Paul, including outgoing Senator Jim Bunning[31]– himself slighted by the party establishment, who pressured him to not seek reelection in the first place.[32] It is clear that the race fell outside the control of McConnell and the Kentucky GOP, perhaps for the first time since Republicans became an electoral force in the state. Paul would go on to defeat Grayson in the primary by over twenty percentage points.

In the hours and days after Paul was declared the victor, the Republican Party of Kentucky coalesced around him. McConnell, the defeated candidate Grayson, and U.S. Representative Hal Rogers all glowingly endorsed Paul.[33] To McConnell, who perceived a threat to his desire to be chosen Senate Majority leader, Rand Paul was a crucial vote. Otherwise, Paul and other Tea Party-affiliated Senators could move to support McConnell's chief rival for the leadership position, Senator Jim DeMint.[34] To Paul, the support and fundraising prowess of McConnell came at the inexpensive cost of supporting McConnell for Majority Leader. By August 2010, Paul enthusiastically supported McConnell and dialed back many promises he made during the primary,[35] which resulted in some blowback from Tea Party members–[36] but not nearly enough to halt the momentum of Paul's general election campaign. During this time, the

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[27] Abdullah, Halimah. "So goes Rand Paul, so goes movement? - May primary a test of conservative clout." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, April 6, 2010: A1.

[28] Abdullah, Halimah and Jack Brammer. "Palin backs Paul's Senate bid - endorsement likely to appeal to conservatives." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, February 2, 2010: A3.

[29] "Where do candidates stand on Social Security?" *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer (KY)*, September 18, 2010: 7.

[30] "Palin hints at presidential run in 2012 Kicks off Tea Party Express tour in Reno." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, October 19, 2010: A6.

[31] Alford, Roger. "Bunning endorses BG's Paul." *Daily News (Bowling Green, KY)*, April 15, 2010.

[32] Alford, Roger. "Paul, once the outsider, gains GOP support in Ky." *The Seattle Times*, March 12, 2010; Brammer, Jack and Halimah Abdullah. "Bunning will not run for re-election - He says GOP leaders hurt fund-raising." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, July 28, 2009: A1.

[33] Brammer, Jack. "Paul feels the love from GOP - Republicans unite around Senate nominee." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, May 23, 2010: A1.

[34] Abdullah, Halimah. "McConnell stays as minority leader - new stance on earmarks smooths way to re-election." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, November 17, 2010: A1.

[35] Espo, David. "Paul softens rhetoric in Senate race." *Daily News (Bowling Green, KY)*, August 1, 2010.

[36] Brown, Kyle. "Rand Paul, Tea Party connection mellows as election day nears." *Louisville Examiner (KY)*, October 5, 2010.

Kentucky GOP made efforts to incorporate these new or less experienced Tea Party supporters into the party framework, and Paul's campaign met with establishment Republicans in "more than a dozen" meetings.[37] Rand Paul would go on to defeat Democrat Jack Conway in the election by double digits.

The most interesting feature of the 2010 Kentucky elections is how poorly the Tea Party performed outside of Rand Paul's Senate campaign. Despite Tea Party threats toward incumbent officeholders, all six U.S. Congressmen were reelected. Two seats in the 38-member state senate changed from Democratic to Republican (one of which was the result of a Democrat winning a special election the year prior) and an incumbent four-term Republican incumbent lost to a Democrat with no prior electoral history. Across all of Kentucky's elections in 2010, only three candidates explicitly sought the support of the Tea Party or participated in the Tea Party movement. One was Rand Paul; the others were two Kentucky House candidates who ran unopposed in their primaries and were handily defeated by Democrats in the general election.[38]

The 2011 gubernatorial primary saw the Tea Party attempt to build off the success of Rand Paul. Tea Party-backed Phil Moffett sought the GOP nomination and made a concerted effort to distance himself from the establishment choice, Kentucky Senate President David Williams. Williams superficially declared himself a "tea partier", his biggest connection to the movement having campaigned with Rand Paul frequently throughout Paul's 2010 campaign.[39] Despite Moffett performing better than expected, Williams still secured the primary by ten percentage points, or about 15,000 votes. Despite his claims, state Tea Party groups never shifted their support to Williams; as late as late July, a perennial independent candidate was attracting a "lot of support" from Tea Party conservatives.[40] Williams decisively lost the general election to incumbent Governor Steve Beshear, and the only Kentucky Republican success was then-Kentucky state Representative James Comer winning the agricultural commissioner race.[41] Those with Tea Party ties in the state were quick to blame establishment Republicans for William's failure, arguing that Comer (who ran with Tea Party support) represented the clearest path to electoral success.[42]

The 2012 election cycle was a mixed bag for the Tea Party. Only twelve Tea Party candidates filed for state legislative elections– a small amount, considering the 100 house seats and 19 senate seats available in 2012, and none of them won contested primaries against incumbents.[43] However, the Tea Party landed a key victory with the election of U.S. Representative Thomas Massie: in a seven-person open primary, Massie received immense

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[37] Estep, Bill. "GOP builds bridge to Paul - party tries to bring Grayson voters into the fold with nominee's backers." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, June 13, 2010: A1.

[38] Vied, Steve. "GOP wave hits Daviess with force Local political leaders cite national mood, local insurance tax hike as factors in shift." *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer (KY)*, November 4, 2010: 1.

[39] Brammer, Jack. "Tea party, Williams or Moffett? Election will get tip off of sorts Wednesday in Fayette." *Daily News (Bowling Green, KY)*, November 15, 2010.

[40] Eblen, Tom. "Where can we the people turn? Fed-up public has few alternatives." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, July 27, 2011: 1B.

[41] "Comer's GOP victory crosses party lines - Only Republican to win garners most votes in any race." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, November 9, 2011: 5A.

[42] Brammer, Jack and Halimah Abdullah. "Tea Party: Losses by GOP not our fault Ky. Republican party needs true conservatives, it says." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, November 12, 2011: A1.

[43] "Tea Party movement sets sights on Ky. legislature - several of its favorites are seeking office." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, February 6, 2012: 4A; Musgrave, Beth. "Incumbents are one shy of sweep - Louisville's Hurt stumbles in primary; Shell bucks big names in Garrard." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, May 23, 2012: A6.

support from Rand Paul and fundraising in excess of $500,000 from a Texas Tea Party group to secure the nomination.[44] Additionally, arguably the most significant gain for the movement in 2012 was the Tea Party's apparent influence on incumbent Republicans– especially McConnell, who spoke at multiple Tea Party rallies and hired a longtime Paul family political operative to lead McConnell's 2014 reelection campaign.[45]

Finally, the 2014 GOP primary quickly developed into a proxy war between Mitch McConnell's fundraising machine and national Tea Party fundraising groups. Specifically, the Senate Conservatives Fund (founded by Jim DeMint),[46] the Madison Project (who contributed to the election of Ted Cruz in 2012)[47] and the Tea Party Patriots all pledged money and volunteer resources to McConnell's Tea Party challenger,[48] a then-unknown businessman named Matt Bevin.

Instead of trying to minimize the primary election, however, McConnell identified Bevin as a proxy of national conservative groups and seized the opportunity to defeat them in his home state, wielding his extensive fundraising ability and war chest against them.[49] Despite recent missteps in the Senate that could have undermined his conservative credentials, McConnell had already captured the endorsement of Rand Paul and therefore made it difficult for his opponent to outflank him from the right.[50] McConnell also exploited the fact that Bevin exhibited many weaknesses as a political candidate. By pinning national Tea Party groups to Bevin and then soundly defeating him in the primary by over a two-to-one ratio, McConnell sent a clear warning sign that the pattern of national Tea Party groups finding success in other states' primaries would not happen in Kentucky.[51] Bevin ran for governor the year after, emerging from a contentious four-way primary and . Similarly to Rand Paul's campaign in 2010, McConnell endorsed Bevin once Bevin had clinched the nomination and played a role in his victorious election.[52]

Donald Trump's influence within the Republican Party of Kentucky

The 2016 presidential election cycle began early in Kentucky. Rand Paul became the second Republican to formally launch a presidential campaign, but Paul had already signaled his

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[44] Alford, Roger. "Tea party's Massie wins Ky. 4th District GOP race." *Associated Press State Wire: Kentucky (KY)*, May 23, 2012.

[45] "McConnell to address tea party rally in Frankfort." *Associated Press State Wire: Kentucky (KY)*, July 31, 2012; Alford, Roger. "McConnell hires tea party strategist." *Associated Press State Wire: Kentucky (KY)*, September 13, 2012.

[46] Cassata, Donna. "Conservative group presses McConnell on health law." *Associated Press State Wire: Kentucky (KY)*, August 26, 2013.

[47] Youngman, Sam. "5 field offices to push Bevin bid Madison project hopes ground game will offset McConnell's funding edge." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, January 13, 2014: 3A.

[48] Gold, Matea. "Tea Party PACs lay out little cash on candidates - Group backing Ky.'s Bevin spends $56,000." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, April 28, 2014: A1.

[49] Youngman, Sam. "McConnell set to fight Bevin as well as Grimes - But real target is Tea Party fundraising." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, October 29, 2013: 3A.

[50] Youngman, Sam. "McConnell cozying up to Paul in re-election bid." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, December 31, 2013: 3A.

[51] Youngman, Sam. "'Cards were stacked' in primary election - five-term incumbent McConnell holds big lead - First-time candidate Bevin lacks name recognition." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, May 16, 2014: A1.

[52] Nelson, Richard. "Takeaways from the election." *Harlan Daily Enterprise, The (KY)*, November 7, 2015.

presidential aspirations for several months prior.[53] Paul was also seeking reelection as a U.S. Senator, but Kentucky state laws prohibit a political candidate's name from appearing more than once on any ballot, including a primary ballot. After trying and failing to change state law via the Kentucky General Assembly,[54] Paul rallied the Republican Party of Kentucky to implement a caucus where the presidential race was the only point of order. After months of negotiations, the presidential caucus was set for March 5th, 2016, over two months before Kentucky's normally scheduled primary date.[55] The concessions Paul made to achieve his goal is an indication of how little goodwill was granted to him as a favorite son by Kentucky Republicans. Paul personally had to give the party $250,000 to fund the caucus; the caucus was held early to draw national media interest; and Kentucky's delegates were to be granted proportionally (instead of winner-take-all), with a low minimum requirement of votes needed, in order to encourage as many candidates as possible to compete.[56] In spite of the year of effort to effect change in the state party organization, Paul's actions proved to be for naught. Paul suspended his presidential campaign in February 2016, over a month before the Kentucky GOP presidential caucus– that he funded personally– was to be held.[57]

In a continuation of the symbiotic relationship between the two Senators since 2010, Mitch McConnell emerged as an ally to Rand Paul during Paul's quest for the presidential caucus. On two separate occasions in 2015, McConnell endorsed the presidential caucus idea and was instrumental to the negotiations that ultimately passed Paul's proposed rule changes.[58] McConnell also issued an early and influential endorsement for Paul for president.[59] While publicly stating his skepticism of caucuses as late as December of 2015, McConnell nonetheless utilized his influence in the Republican state central committee to swing committee votes in Paul's favor.[60]

Kentucky's presidential caucus appears to embody the larger nationwide conflict between Trump supporters and establishment Republicans during the 2016 primary season. Republicans in search of an alternative to Trump diluted their resources and votes between the remaining candidates. In Kentucky, the low threshold needed to earn delegates (five percent of the caucus vote) may have prevented Trump from a decisive victory in the state, but it also prevented a clear

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[53] Guion, Payton. "Rand Paul launches presidential campaign: Read full announcement here - Rand Paul on Tuesday became the second Republican candidate to formally launch a campaign." *Independent, The/The Independent on Sunday (London, England)*, April 7, 2015.

[54] Youngman, Sam. "Paul must be careful not to alienate his Kentucky base. Voters won't like playing second fiddle." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, January 15, 2015: 3A.

[55] Beam, Adam. "Kentucky GOP OKs caucus; allows Rand Paul presidential run." *Associated Press State Wire: Kentucky (KY)*, August 22, 2015.

[56] Ibid.

[57] "Caucus big moment for state, GOP voters." *Daily News (Bowling Green, KY)*, February 29, 2016.

[58] Youngman, Sam. "In caucus debate, McConnell saves Paul from certain defeat - assurances help sway skeptical republicans." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, August 24, 2015: 3A.

[59] Montanaro, Domenico. "Like Father, Like Son? Not Exactly When It Comes To Rand And Ron Paul." *NPR: Blogs*, April 8, 2015.

[60] Youngman, Sam. "Campaign 2016 State GOP uncertain if caucus for president will meet its goal - Meetings will be March 5 in 111 of Kentucky's 120 counties. Eight candidates have filed to be on ballot; deadline is Jan. 7 - 'I hope it will be a one-year experiment,' Sen. Mitch McConnell says." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, December 24, 2015: 1A.

second place candidate– Ted Cruz, John Kasich, or Marco Rubio– from standing out.[61] Trump became the only candidate to visit the state in advance of the caucus,[62] potentially a large factor in receiving seventeen delegates. Cruz gained fifteen delegates despite no presence in the state,[63] and Rubio and Kasich were granted seven delegates each.

The Republican Party of Kentucky experienced significant stability in its leadership throughout the Trump administration. In fact, only three chairmen of the state party have served in the position since 2007. Steve Robertson and Mac Brown served for a combined sixteen years. Both men had prior experience working with Mitch McConnell, and McConnell endorsed them for the chair position that was never seriously contested otherwise.[64] It is only since 2023 that chair Robert Benvenuti has served. Benvenuti is distinct for being the first chair to not have been elected with McConnell's explicit blessing or endorsement in two decades, as McConnell began to reduce his Republican leadership duties in 2023. That said, Benvenuti is a former three-term Kentucky House member and served in the administration of former Kentucky Governor Ernie Fletcher, who McConnell recruited and endorsed in 2003.[65]

As Mitch McConnell hands the reins to others over the next few years, Benvenuti's role as the chair of the party is especially significant. On the one hand, Kentucky Republicans maintain their largest majorities in Kentucky's history and each chamber holds the ability to override Democratic Governor Andy Beshear's veto power. On the other, the absence of McConnell as the figurehead of the party (as well as his fundraising acumen) will almost certainly create friction within Republican circles, both state-wide and nationally. In the wake of Democratic Governor Andy Beshear's enforcement of COVID-19 protocols and, later that year, the 2020 presidential election, small but significant groups of the Kentucky GOP materialized.[66] Squarely to the right of where Mitch McConnell normally anchors the state party, the so-called "Liberty" caucus is located in Northern Kentucky and has successfully primaried several establishment Republicans in the region.[67] Thomas Massie and Americans for Prosperity are bankrolling these smaller state House elections against "establishment" targets in alliance with Andy Barr, James Comer, and the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce.[68] Whether or not federal elected officials and national fundraising groups being involved will lead to organizational instability at the state party level remains to be seen.

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[61] Beam, Adam and Bruce Schreiner. "Trump takes Kentucky caucus, will share delegates with Cruz." *Associated Press State Wire: Kentucky (KY)*, March 6, 2016.

[62] Beam, Adam. "Kentucky presidential caucus defies turnout expectations." *Associated Press State Wire: Kentucky (KY)*, March 6, 2016.

[63] Ibid.

[64] "Kentucky's GOP Selects New Chairman - Russell Replaced By Fletcher's Choice." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, June 4, 2007: B1; "Republican Party of Kentucky names next chairman." *Associated Press State Wire: Kentucky (KY)*, November 9, 2015.

[65] Horn, Austin. "Lexington's Robert Benvenuti named KY Republican chair." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, December 13, 2023: 6A; Alessi, Ryan. "At Pomp's Center Stands Powerful GOP Senator." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, December 10, 2003: A1.

[66] Horn, Austin. "Central KY primary is a window into the future of state GOP." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, May 3, 2022: 1A.

[67] Horn, Austin. "Three major incumbents beaten in Northern KY GOP primary." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, May 25, 2022: 1A.

[68] Horn, Austin. "'Liberty' Republicans aren't easy to define." *Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)*, May 21, 2024: 1A.

Conclusion

The Republican Party of Kentucky stands out among its contemporaries for its durability in the face of groups with seemingly ample opportunity to take over the party. The state's evangelical Christian population, for example, appears large enough to be able to make inroads into the state GOP; however, the extent of the social conservative platform (beyond abortion) and the conservativeness of Democratic candidates at the time prevented the state Republican Party from being targeted for infiltration. Similarly, one of the defining victories of the Tea Party movement in 2010– the election of U.S. Senator Rand Paul– might lead one to conclude that the Tea Party movement gained influence in the state party, when in fact the conservative tilt of the party and the efforts of Mitch McConnell to co-opt the Tea Party's message were enough to keep any Tea Party networks in Kentucky at arm's length. Finally, Donald Trump may have won the Kentucky GOP's caucus in 2016, but the nature of how delegates were allocated reveals that establishment (albeit conservative) Republicans still controlled the state party and would continue to do so throughout Trump's first administration.

In this chapter, I described the overwhelming success of the state Republican party in recent years to recruit conservative candidates and win elections up and down the ballot; several features of Kentucky state law and party bylaws that create a strong state party organization, with little opportunity for grassroots or local takeover; and the role that Mitch McConnell played in leading the party for decades. The proven track record of the state GOP made it nearly impossible for an outsider candidate to challenge incumbents from the right, or for grassroots organizations to claim a lack of success to justify shaking things up within the party. The state's unique election cycles– when combined with the party's committee membership, organizational hierarchy, and state supremacy over the other levels of the party– makes it equally unlikely for an outsider organization to breach the well-defended party structure. McConnell, as the face of the Kentucky GOP since his first election in 1984, is likely responsible for many of these design points that keep himself and the party establishment in firm control. Moreover, McConnell's acumen as a party leader was put on full display in the 2010s: one on hand, he nullified any threat of a Tea Party movement in the state by attaching himself to Rand Paul and adopting some Tea Party messaging in 2010 and 2012. On the other hand, McConnell fought mercilessly against outsider spending during his 2014 primary election and remained in control of the state party during Trump's first administration.

The Republican Party of Kentucky offers the clearest evidence in support of the dissertation's state-level institutions hypothesis and the state party hypothesis. Regarding the former, it is difficult (if not impossible) to name an elected official with a closer relationship to a state party than McConnell is with the Kentucky GOP. McConnell's influence on both party leader choices and Republican candidates up and down the ballot creates a rare political environment where all three of the state government, elected officials, and the state party work in carefully coordinated harmony. Second, features of the state party have made entry into influential positions within the party a struggle for insurgents, supporting the state party hypothesis. Finally, I find mixed support for the party competition hypothesis. For most of the past few decades, the conservative core of the state party has remained unshaken; however, provided the recent rise of the "Liberty" Caucus in the state, running far to the right of even the conservative faction within the state GOP, I find tentative support for the party competition hypothesis: when limited party competition exists at the sub-national level, factional capture of the state party may be more frequent or likely.

McConnell's position as kingmaker in Kentucky Republican politics, the powerful and deep slate of Republican elected officials at every level, and the nature of the party's committee membership and leadership positions keeps the Republican Party of Kentucky distinct from the national Republican Party in perhaps the strongest refutation of nationalization out of all the case studies in this dissertation. Even the emerging archconservative Liberty Caucus in Kentucky, while beginning to work with national fundraising groups, is still endemic to a particular region in the state. That said, Kentucky's Republicans continue to move rightward across all levels of government, from its U.S. House delegation to state and county level positions. Given the unviability of the Kentucky Democratic Party outside of the governor's mansion, deeply conservative ideology has become a monolith throughout the state and may be unrepresentative of the views of the average Kentuckian citizen, even when accounting for the conservativeness of the state's electorate.

As previously discussed, McConnell's decision to phase himself out of state Republican affairs in 2023 has the potential to create a significant power vacuum in the state party. The party's current chair, Robert Benvenuti, comes from an establishment background and was recently elected to a full four-year term in 2025.[69] In a blog post published on the Kentucky GOP's website, Benvenuti reaffirms the strength of the Republican Party in Kentucky and outlines his vision and principles without mention of the national Republican Party or Trump.[70] Until 2029 at the earliest, then, Kentucky Republicans will have a chair and committee that remain committed to the state party over national Republican movements. On the other hand, intraparty conflict may come to a head with the rise of the Liberty Caucus in the state, whose candidates seek to run to the right of even the most conservative Republican elected officials in the state legislature. Additionally, influential Republicans like Rand Paul and Thomas Massie have ample opportunities to lay claim to state party influence in the next two election cycles with McConnell increasingly out of the picture.

[69] "Republican Party of Kentucky names newly elected officers; Robert Benvenuti elected to full term as chair". *Northern Kentucky Tribune*, June 12, 2025.

[70] "Benvenuti: The Republican Party is Kentucky's Party". From https://rpk.org/benvenuti-the-republican-party-is-kentuckys-party.

Chapter 5: Colorado Republican Party

Introduction

The Colorado Republican Party was selected with the initial classification as "Low" in Christian Right era intraparty conflict and "High" in both the Tea Party and Trump eras. Traditionally, Colorado's state parties have been described as weak: as early as the 1970s, for example, Cotter et al. (1989) notes that Colorado subjects its political parties to regulation more so than 41 other states.[1] Perhaps uncoincidentally, the Colorado GOP has more or less been continually embroiled in intraparty factionalism since the 1980s. If anything, an updated classification of the Colorado GOP might register it as "High" in intraparty conflict across all three eras of interest. First, the state party establishment routinely butted heads with social conservatives until 1998, when a socially conservative chair was controversially elected and gave his faction control of the entire party for two years. A few years later, the Tea Party movement ran rampant in the Colorado GOP's assembly system. Party leaders and rank-and-file members from before 2010 were gradually crowded out or replaced, and emphasis on ideological purity began to dwarf the party's goal of winning elections. Finally– and despite strong support for Ted Cruz and against Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential primary– the party gradually coalesced around unilateral support of Trump by the end of his first term. To this day, Republican candidates and party leaders in Colorado frequently invoke their support of Trump as a proxy for Republican purity.

In this chapter, I show that the rapid changes to the state's electorate and election laws have disproportionately been to the detriment of the Colorado Republican Party. Colorado state law imposes external, but not internal, rules on its state parties that renders them vulnerable to rapid rules and organizational shifts through intraparty conflict. The absence of a relationship between the state party, elected officials, or the state government lends support to the state-level institutions hypothesis posited in this dissertation. Furthermore, the party's assembly system is designed to promote its grassroots members, but outsider groups and national political movements have reliably co-opted it in order to gain influence within the state party apparatus. Therefore, the state party hypothesis is also supported. Features of both state law and of the state party's decisions combine to create an environment especially favorable to groups with focused political goals and the expertise to navigate the state party's organizational structure.

Colorado's electorate has increasingly moved toward the Democratic Party over the time period of study. With fewer Republicans winning elections, the state GOP chair has become the symbolic face of Colorado Republicans. Frequently, however, the chair is embroiled in infighting, preventing the party from achieving larger goals like expanding Republican party membership or electing Republican candidates. State law has also contributed to the development of a weaker party system. Campaign finance laws, for example, prohibit corporations, labor unions, and independent expenditure committees from giving money to the state parties. In recent years, the electorate has also passed ballot propositions to eliminate the

[1] Cotter, Cornelius, James L. Gibson, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. *Party organizations in American politics*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989.

caucuses and to open presidential primaries to unaffiliated voters. Therefore, little incentive is created to participate in or give to the state party for electioneering purposes, so the Colorado GOP tends to succumb to ideological infighting instead.

The Colorado Republican Party's defining feature lies in its assembly system: a series of conventions that elect the convention membership at the next highest level of the party, from the neighborhood precincts through to the state party convention. The party's heavily decentralized power structure not only gives a disproportionately large voice to newcomers and outsiders, but it also facilitates the election of a chair representative of their wishes. During each of the three national Republican movements covered in this dissertation, the party leadership has been replaced in this manner. Historically, external groups (like presidential campaigns and single-issue organizations) have taken advantage of the party structure by flooding precinct assemblies and seeking to rebuild party membership to favor their goals.

Background Information

Colorado			
Colorado Elections		Colorado Republican Party	
Primary type	Partially closed primary (1992-2000) Caucus (2004-2016) Partially closed primary (2020-) (party votes to allow unaffiliated voters each election)	**State party officer elections**	Elected by Colorado Republican Committee
Presidential/state primaries	Separate events	**State party officer elections schedule**	Odd-numbered years
Presidential delegate allocation	Proportional (-2000) Caucus-convention (2004-2016) Proportional (2020-) Proportional with winner-take-all trigger (2024-)	**State party convention cycle**	Odd-numbered years
State election cycle	Even-numbered, non-presidential years	**Pre-primary endorsements**	No - banned with few exceptions

As is typical with other states in the Mountain West, Colorado has one of the fastest growing populations in the 21st century: Colorado grew nearly twice as fast as the rest of the country, with 15 percent growth from 2010 to 2010.[2] The "Front Range" of Colorado, which

[2] "2020 Census: Percent Change in Resident Population for the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico: 2010 to 2020". *U.S. Census Bureau*. April 27, 2021.

contains all of the largest cities in the state, has grown the fastest while the rural areas are shrinking.[3] The most striking feature of the Colorado electorate is their general aversion to formal affiliation with either major political party. National trends indicate a steady rise in unaffiliated/independent voters since around 2008.[4] Colorado lagged behind the national average from 2008 to 2016, but experienced an explosion of unaffiliated voters in the state beginning in 2016.[5] The rise of unaffiliated voters in the state is unprecedented: Colorado has one of the largest gross populations of independent/unaffiliated voters in the country, and is one of several states whose unaffiliated voters outnumber registered Republicans or Democrats. As of 2024, the unaffiliated voters represent 48 percent of the electorate in Colorado with 1.8 million unaffiliated voters. Registered Democrats constitute 27 percent of the electorate and registered Republicans at 24 percent.[6] Unaffiliated voters are able to freely participate in either party's primary elections, although the Colorado Democratic Party leadership has been more receptive to this voter bloc than the Colorado Republican Party's in recent years (as I will discuss).

Past political science research has less to say about Colorado than many other states included in this dissertation, likely due to its relatively short history. Elazar and Sharkansky (building upon Elazar's work) compare Colorado to Utah: both are moralistic states (i.e. they emphasize citizen participation and voting) who register very low in political culture.[7] Mayhew, assigning the lowest TPO score of 1 out of 5, compares Colorado's unique assembly system to party organizations (setting slates of candidates before voters may select them) but also finds that the parties are largely volunteer-based and lack enforcement when it comes to recruiting candidates and fundraising.[8] Finally, Gibson et al. (1983) assigns a much higher organizational capacity score to the Colorado GOP than to the Colorado Democratic Party, suggesting that the two parties only became more organizationally competitive after 1980.[9]

Colorado Republicans experienced long periods of state legislative control until the 2000s. Despite an almost unified Republican state government from 1999 to 2004 and little to no partisan influence in the 1990 and 2000 redistricting efforts,[10] Republicans began the decade with a 60 percent majority in the state Senate and state House and ended the decade as 40 percent minorities in each chamber. While Republicans won two statewide positions and regained control of the state House in 2010, the gubernatorial election was a disaster: Democrat John Hickenlooper was elected in large part due to the Republican Party fracturing. Businessman and outsider Dan Maes secured the Colorado Republican Party primary with Tea Party support, but former Republican U.S. House member Tom Tancredo–citing Maes' unelectability– launched a third-party campaign and severely divided the Republican voter base.

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[3] "County Population Totals and Components of Change: 2020-2023." *U.S. Census Bureau*. June 7, 2024.
[4] Jones, Jeffrey M. "Independent Party ID Tied for High; Democratic ID at New Low." *Gallup*. January 12, 2024.
[5] Frank, John. "Colorado hits a new milestone with unaffiliated voters and busts the myth about its even partisan split." *The Colorado Sun*. December 26, 2019.
[6] Voter Registration Statistics, Colorado Secretary of State.
[7] Elazar, Daniel Judah. "American federalism: A view from the states." 1966; Sharkansky, Ira. "The utility of Elazar's political culture: A research note." *Polity* 2, no. 1 (1969): 66-83. 1969.
[8] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986
[9] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.
[10] Sabet, Navid, and Noam Yuchtman. "Identifying partisan gerrymandering and its consequences: Evidence from the 1990 US census redistricting." (2023); Lublin, David, and Michael P. McDonald. "Is It Time to Draw the Line? The Impact of Redistricting on Competition in State House Elections." *Election Law Journal* 5, no. 2 (2006): 144-157.

Colorado Republicans had some successes in 2014– highlighted by Republican Cory Gardner defeating incumbent Democratic U.S. Senator Mark Udall– but no significant electoral victories since. Nonetheless, the Colorado Republican Party played a significant role in the 2016 Republican presidential primary in two ways. First, it was through Colorado's primary convention process that Donald Trump suffered one of the most lopsided losses in the 2016 primary season, in which Ted Cruz won 33 delegates to Trump's one. Second, the Colorado delegation to the RNC played an outsized role in fighting against the party's eventual nomination of Trump as the Republican presidential candidate.

The past few election cycles no longer exhibit any two-party competitiveness from earlier years, but the Republican candidates nominated and supported by the state GOP reveal a significant ideological shift. The difference between extreme pro-Trump candidates and establishment ones in Colorado Republican politics has never been more distinct. The Trump-supported candidates in Colorado tend to have greater fundraising success, but lose by greater margins than more traditional, establishment Republican candidates. For example, Tina Peters (an election denial advocate convicted for election fraud) raised more money during the 2022 secretary of state Republican primary than the eventual primary winner, Pam Anderson, was able to raise during the entire election cycle.[11]

Election and primary laws

Party organizations in Colorado have a long history of rank-and-file party members playing an outsized part in nominating party candidates for political office. For all partisan elected offices across the state, Colorado uses a nominating system in which the party convention (called an "assembly") is held prior to the party primary election. Most candidates for elected office must first win at least 30 percent of the vote at a county or state convention before their names will be placed on the ballot in the party primary. The only exceptions to this statutory requirement are for a limited number of candidates who gather petition signatures to get on the primary ballot rather than go through the convention. Prior to the 1990s, the percentage of delegate votes required at conventions was 20 percent; the increase to 30% of the vote was intended to increase the likelihood for incumbents to be renominated without primary opposition.

Over a century of this assembly process underscores, or perhaps gives rise to, a state political culture that prioritizes civic participation and control over its own government. Elected officials have term limits and can be recalled; the electorate may vote directly on multiple types of ballot measures; and Colorado is routinely cited as one of the most effective states in election administration in the 21st century.[12] In 2013, Colorado adopted both the universal mail ballot (about 70% of voters had opted into it previously) and same day voter registration. Republicans in the Colorado House mounted token opposition to the measures but any substantial legislative conflict never materialized.

As a response to record turnout and overcrowding at the March 2016 Democratic caucuses, ballot initiatives Proposition 107 and 108 were launched and approved by voters in the 2016 general election. Proposition 107 eliminated the party caucuses in Colorado and re-established the presidential primary, which had last been held in Colorado from 1992-2000. The

[11] Colorado Campaign Finance Disclosure Database, Colorado Secretary of State.

[12] MIT Elections Performance Index.

passage of Proposition 108 partially opened the primary, allowing unaffiliated voters to vote (by mail-in ballot) on their choice of one party's primary ballot. Language in Proposition 108 granted the state parties the option to opt out of the primaries entirely and revert back to a caucus/assembly system to determine their nominees. The voting threshold for a party to opt out of the primary, however, is a high bar– three-fourths of the state party's central committee. There is no indication that the Colorado Democratic Party's central committee has ever attempted to opt out of the Colorado presidential primary using this rule. In contrast, the vote to opt out has been repeatedly attempted (to no avail) within the Colorado GOP to block unaffiliated voters from their primary process.

Since Propositions 107 and 108 took effect, the Republican Party of Colorado has been split between those who want to opt out of the primary system each election cycle (thereby excluding unaffiliated voters from participation) and those who do not. The chairman election of 2017 boiled down to the opt-out decision: Jeff Hays (who won the chairmanship by a 2 to 1 margin) represented the voice of those Republicans who wanted to move on from fighting over the election law.[13] A September 2017 vote by the Republican State Central Committee affirmed the party's primary participation for the 2018 elections in a 67 to 33 percent vote. Two years later, a 2019 vote to exclude unaffiliated voters in the 2020 elections failed again.

A September 18, 2021 meeting by the state GOP held the opt-out decision to yet another vote. The committee voted to continue participating in the state's primary system by identical margins to the vote in 2017 (67 percent voting to participate, 33 percent voting to opt out), but two other motions– approved unanimously– gave party leadership the green light to file a lawsuit against the Colorado Secretary of State challenging the legality of Propositions 107 and 108. Lawyer John Eastman, already embroiled in controversy for his role in challenging the national 2020 presidential election results, was hired to lead the legal challenge. The plaintiffs in the lawsuit allege that the three-fourths threshold is "nearly impossible" to achieve, while also citing the unanimous resolution of the central committee to seek litigation as a mandate to their legal challenge.[14] The lawsuit was filed in March of 2022 and dismissed by the U.S. District Court a month later, with the judge citing the three-fourths vote opt-out rule as a clear avenue for the party to exclude unaffiliated voters from the primary process.[15]

Granted considerations of electoral self-interest, it is unsurprising but nonetheless interesting to note the divide in attitudes between Colorado Republican elected officials and state GOP officials. Virtually every Republican candidate for elective office either supported staying in the primaries or offered no opinion on the controversy, including all Republican U.S. House members from Colorado: Lauren Boebert, Ken Buck, and Doug Lamborn.[16] A key exception was former State Representative Dave Williams, perhaps the most vocal advocate for opting out of the primaries and seeking to challenge Propositions 107 and 108 in court. Williams was elected chair of the Colorado GOP in 2023 and the same Colorado Republican Party infighting over the issue of the primary opt-out continued. While the 2023 outcome remained the same as the previous three attempts, Williams and other supporters of the opt out employed tactics to attempt

[13] Frank, John. "Two-man race could affect 1.3M voters." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, March 31, 2017: 8A.

[14] Bradbury, Shelly. "Judge tosses Colorado Republicans' lawsuit over unaffiliated voters in primary elections." *Daily Record, The (Cañon City, CO)*, April 10, 2022.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Luning, Ernest. "Colorado GOP nixes canceling 2022 primary but OKs suit to challenge system." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, September 18, 2021.

to reach the three-fourths threshold to opt out of the presidential primary. I discuss these attempts in greater detail in the next section.

Party rules and bylaws

Static Features

Colorado state law lays out many key components of state party rules in great detail, including nearly the entire structure of the major state parties, precinct caucus eligibility and procedures, and how vacancies in elective offices are to be filled by the party. The Colorado GOP has three main bodies of leadership at the state level: the state officers (chair, vice chair, secretary) elected by the state central committee; the state executive committee; and the state central committee. Of the three bodies, only the executive committee can be more flexibly tuned by each party's bylaws. In the Colorado GOP, the executive committee advises the chair and handles controversies, including settling party disputes and declaring vacancies in office. There were 25 members of the executive committee in 2023: ten of these members are county-level party officers, eight are representatives of each congressional district central committee, and seven are a combination of the state party officers, any statewide Republicans in office, and the Republican leaders in each chamber of the Colorado General Assembly. Therefore, an overwhelming majority of the executive committee's members come from below the state level.

Furthermore, the state central committee is almost entirely composed of the party officers from each county GOP. Crucially, state law outlines party organizations' ability to accrue bonus committee members through strong election performance: every 10,000 votes for the most recent Republican gubernatorial or presidential candidate yields two additional representatives from that county on the state central committee. Bonus members to the state central committee are elected by the respective county central committee, increasing the county-level influence on the state party even further. The low number of votes to earn bonus members (the 10,000 votes formula has been in place since at least 1914) results in large variation in total committee membership: for example, there were 500 members in 2001 and approximately 300 members in 2011. Provided that the state central committee elects the party's officers, changes to the party rules (as I outline below) have created a dynamic of county- and local-level party members working with the chair in tandem to realize their goals.

Other institutional features of the party include a handful of standing committees and relatively low quorum requirements for party activities. The standing committees include a bylaws committee that reviews proposed amendments, makes recommendations to the state central committee, and keeps the party's bylaws compliant with any new laws or rules from the RNC. Quorum for standing committee meetings is a majority of members present, or one-third if members were notified over a week in advance of the meeting time and place. This one-third quorum rule is echoed in quorum rules for executive and central committee meetings: one-third of voting members must be present. Crucially, however, the departure of members is not cause for adjournment by the state central committee once a quorum is met. Additionally, there is no quorum for any party assembly or convention.

Dynamic Features

There have been nine iterations of the Colorado GOP bylaws submitted to the Colorado Secretary of State since 2001. The largest number of changes between any two versions of the bylaws occurred from 2007 to 2009. These changes affected all levels of the party to some extent. At the precinct level, proxy voting was banned in caucuses, and precinct officers were now to be elected by plurality rule as of 2009. Both of these changes theoretically stand to benefit the grassroots members of the party more so than the establishment: an influx of new members at a precinct caucus now immediately attain a plurality of voting power, and those who would rely on proxy voting the most– incumbents or elected officials who would be most knowledgeable of proxy voting procedures– would now be unable to utilize it.

At the top level of the party, the chair gained significant power in the executive committee. The 2009 version of the bylaws clearly defines the chair's duty in filling these appointed member slots, and the chair was given two more appointment slots than in previous years. Another rule was added in 2009 stating that "standing or special committees may be composed of members other than members of the CRC"; it is the chairman's responsibility to appoint these committees, so the ability to reach outside the party apparatus to fill positions is questionable. Finally, there were several procedural changes made in the 2009 bylaws. For example, the following passage was removed beginning in the 2009 iteration:

> *"Notice of the call for any caucus, leading to the selection of delegates to a congressional convention, or state convention at which national convention delegates are selected shall be published in a newspaper or newspapers of general circulation in the county, by the appropriate chairman not less than fifteen days prior to the date of such caucus or convention. The broadest possible participation of all qualified citizens in the delegate selection process will be encouraged."*

Not requiring any public notice of a caucus or assembly–which is boilerplate language in many other state party's bylaws– makes it more difficult for political novices to participate in the party, and the removal of a normative statement about encouraging participation calls into question the intent of the bylaws committee and state party leadership with respect to their assembly process.

While changes up to and including the 2009 bylaws seemed to exclude and to centralize authority toward the chair and executive leadership, changes to 2011 tend to favor the grassroots members of the party instead. Some changes made in 2011 are even direct refutations of rules added in 2009; for example, the chair lost some of their aforementioned appointment slots for the executive committee. Counties now receive four more executive committee member slots, while the chair lost four such appointments. Given the small number of executive committee members, this rules change represents a substantial shift in power away from the chair and state level and toward the counties. Surprisingly, this rule change was supported by the chair at the time. Former party chair Dick Wadhams ascribes this counterintuitive decision to hubris: the chair operated under the mistaken assumption that the county parties would be loyal to him when appointing members of the executive committee.[17]

Next, the 2015 bylaws contain a new appendix that lists 23 meeting rules "designed to provide general rules for the conduct of regular and special meetings" of the state party. The language in this appendix explicitly states that the rules "are not part of the official Bylaws of the Colorado Republican Party" and that they can be replaced by either state or county central

[17] Interview with author, September 2024.

committees. Yet, many of the meeting rules include citations to the applicable provisions of the official bylaws. Additionally, it is Colorado state law for major political parties to submit their bylaws to the Secretary of State, and the appendices of the bylaws are included in the document that the party submits. Therefore, the legality of the meeting rules listed in the 2015 bylaws and in future versions is unclear, although no legal challenge to these rules has been made to date. The origin of the appendix of meeting rules is also unclear: the state party establishes a bylaws committee, but the designation of the meeting rules in the appendix apparently means that they do not have the authority to review these additions. One source makes reference to a rules committee that deals with meeting rules and parliamentary procedures, but no such committee is defined in any version of the Colorado GOP bylaws.[18] It appears that meeting rules may be added while skirting the organizational procedures in place, located in the same gray area as their enforceability.

The authority of the meeting rules is confusing, but the meaning behind many of the rules is clear: they frequently undermine democratic norms of participation in deference to the chair. In fact, the first meeting rule listed establishes Robert's Rules of Order for meetings where it is "not inconsistent with the Colorado Republican State Central Committee Bylaws, the laws of the State of Colorado, or these Rules", and declares that the meeting rules listed can be replaced by permanent meeting rules by a two-thirds vote. These meeting rules also give the Chair the authority to alter the order of business of the meeting and the discretion over who is able to speak at meetings; discretion over the resolution of party controversies; and the ability to allow or prohibit any distributed or displayed literature at or outside the vicinity of the meetings as he or she sees fit.

Since 2016, the chairman of the Colorado GOP has continued accruing authority through bylaws changes. The 2019 bylaws grant the chair the power to construct party policies relating to conflicts of interest, disclosure, election integrity, credentialing, and other topics. The "meeting rules" first introduced in the 2015 bylaws have not only persisted, but continued to grow. The most recent version of the bylaws adds several more meeting rules to bring the total to 34, spanning six pages of the overall bylaws document. Among other changes, a provision to replace or overturn the meeting rules has been removed; the opportunity for elected officials or party members to introduce themselves and speak at meetings has been removed; and a restrictive time limit was implemented for any debate on a party issue or question. Many of the new rules also focus on elections and votes held within the party, such as adding additional stipulations for proxy voters and requirements to archive all votes taken at meetings.

As previously highlighted, a large source of intraparty conflict in recent years revolves around the vote to opt out of the state presidential primary (excluding unaffiliated voters from the Republican primary process). In 2023's bylaws, a meeting in odd-numbered years was codified with the sole, specific purpose to hold a vote to opt out. In 2023, the chair and officers tried (and ultimately failed) to pass an amendment to the party bylaws that would count all absent and nonvoting members as "yes" votes to any motion brought to a vote during a meeting. Significantly, a version of this amendment was added as a meeting rule in 2023 that applies specifically to the opt out vote: "any voting member credentialed into the Meeting either in person or by proxy who does not cast a vote for or against any matter pertaining to CRS 1-4-702 shall be tallied with the majority of votes cast on that matter." The addition of such a rule reinforces the suspicions pertaining to these meeting rules: they seem to exist outside of the

[18] Longtime Colorado Republican Party member, former El Paso County Commissioner, and former Congressional candidate Duncan Bremer, interview with author, September 2024.

purview of rank-and-file party members and the bylaws committee, and seem to be created to pursue personal goals without being subjected to party organization oversight.

Intraparty Conflicts in the Colorado Republican Party

Colorado's social conservatives in the 1990s

The Colorado Republican Party was chaired by Bruce Benson from 1987 to 1993. Benson privately opposed abortion rights, but he emphasized that abortion wasn't a state-level issue, should not solely define a Republican candidate, and should not be a source of division within state and local parties.[19] The first signs of intraparty conflict relating to Christian Right issues appear in the 1992 primary season. The 1992 election cycle in Colorado had a few cases where social conservatives won their Republican primaries (although they would ultimately lose in the general election). A June 1992 newspaper article references efforts made by the Colorado Springs Right to Life and the Christian Coalition to link socially conservative values with the Republican party. Interestingly, Colorado Right to Life also published their intent to "take control" of Democratic precinct caucuses, many of which were claimed to have "no one in attendance."[20]

After Benson declined to run for a fourth term in order to run for governor in 1994, a three-way race for Colorado GOP chair ensued. All three candidates in the race, including the eventual victor Don Bain, espoused pro-choice views.[21] State anti-abortion groups cited their inability to find someone to run for chair in the wake of the 1992 elections.[22] Despite the national conservative movement involving the Contract With America, Colorado's 1994 election cycle yielded disappointing results for Republicans in the state, creating an opportunity for social conservatives to once again attempt to take over the party organization. Some primary races were reported to have socially conservative candidates "pack the caucuses" to be selected as delegates for future party assemblies.[23] Party insiders claim that the 1996 presidential election helped forestall intraparty conflict; furthermore, there were only five socially conservative candidates across all General Assembly races in 1996.[24] Throughout this period, the chairman Bain maintained that making abortion a "litmus test of who is a good Republican" was a "big

[19] "Will Abortion Issue Divide Republicans? Some Say It Will, But Colorado GOP Leader Insists That It Won't." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, June 7, 1992: 12.
[20] Blake, Peter. "Abortion Foes Wield Big Stick Against GOP." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, June 15, 1992: 7.
[21] "Three vie for Republican chairman slot - Contenders say they want party to stay out of abortion debate." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, February 23, 1993: 3.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Laden, Rich. "Morrison vs. Gray: This time it's war - Charges fly in House GOP battle." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, August 4, 1994: 1.
[24] Luzadder, Dan. "Mainstream GOP Fears Right Wing - Some Republicans See Party Coming Under The Control Of Anti-Gay, Anti-Abortion, Pro-Gun Religious Extremists." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, October 20, 1996: 18A.

mistake."[25] Other establishment Republican leaders echoed this sentiment,[26] although the problem of abortion dividing the state party never faded during this period.

The 1998 election cycle represented the culmination of three factors that contributed to the party being taken over by social conservatives. First, Colorado voters passed term limit ballot measures in 1990 that began to affect elected officials in 1998. The term limits created an unprecedented number of open races that disproportionately affected municipalities with (now term-limited) Republican incumbents: 7 of 9 open state Senate seats, and 13 of 18 state House seats.[27] The Speaker of the House, House Majority Leader, and Assistant House Majority Leader were all term-limited by this change. Second, new campaign finance limits passed by ballot initiative in 1996 heavily restricted the amount of money individuals and parties could donate to candidates. Consequently, third party groups would play an even larger role in organizing activists and raising money for candidates– to the detriment of the state party's own fundraising ability. Third, the investments made by social conservatives at the grassroots level in previous years were beginning to pay off across higher levels of the party.[28]

Despite calls among the party establishment to "draft" Bain for a third two-year term, Bain eventually decided not to run.[29] The March 1997 chair election was mired in several hours of roll-call voting and arguments over discrepancies in ballot counting.[30] Denver County Republican Party Chair Steve Curtis emerged as the eventual victor over a candidate who had been active in Colorado Republican politics for three decades.[31] While both candidates were considered conservatives, Curtis set himself apart as the anti-abortion, pro-death penalty choice. The final tally was 173 votes to 171, with two blank ballots and one ballot marked "none of the above."[32]

Curtis' controversial victory follows an equally controversial path. Curtis was an unaffiliated voter up until 1994, and in 1996 won the chairmanship of the Denver County GOP by eight votes.[33] As early as two months into his term, Curtis began a crusade that sought to shake out the moderate Republicans from the party and attempt to grow out the socially conservative wing. In 1997 alone, Curtis moved the state convention to Colorado Springs, the epicenter of the religious right at the time;[34] sought to remove elected officials from serving as

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[25] "Group Tells GOP It Must Stand Firm On Abortion - Focus On Family Decries Party's 'Big Tent' Approach." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, March 10, 1995: 12A.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Thomsen, Scott. "Term limits to force dramatic changes in Colorado politics - Competition lining up for '98." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, November 18, 1996: 1.

[28] Thomsen, Scott. "GOP vote signals right turn - Social issues pushed to front." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, February 13, 1997: 1.

[29] Blake, Peter. "Surprise Awaits State GOP Chief." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, December 4, 1996: 55A.

[30] Brown. Fred. "GOP selects Curtis State party chooses newcomer as chair." *The Denver Post*, March 23, 1997: B-01; Brown, Fred. "State party chiefs meet one-on-one." *The Denver Post*, March 31, 1997: B-01.

[31] Brown, Fred. "GOP set to elect chairman Race for post takes a confrontational turn." *The Denver Post*, March 22, 1997: B-01.

[32] Roos, Charles. "Last Hurrah Sam Zakhem, An Unforgettable Presence." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, March 28, 1997: 56A.

[33] Brown. Fred. "GOP selects Curtis State party chooses newcomer as chair." *The Denver Post*, March 23, 1997: B-01.

[34] Blake, Peter. "State Republicans Move Convention To Springs." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, May 17, 1997: 10A.

members of the party's executive committee;[35] sought to grant affiliation status to an extreme Christian Republican group;[36] and attempted to pass several bylaws meant to empower the chair position.[37] Through speeches and written articles, Curtis called pro-choice Republicans "intellectually dishonest", endorsed the idea of a litmus test for Republican candidates, and denounced the notion of the Republican Party as a "Big Tent."[38]

Although many of Curtis' actions and statements were fought against by establishment or moderate Republicans throughout 1997, right-wing or socially conservative members realized their goal of taking over the party had succeeded. For example, a little-known primary challenger to incumbent Republican U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell nonetheless expressed confidence in his prospects, reasoning that the state convention (held several months after this statement was made) will be much more conservative and that the party is no longer run by the "17th Street crowd" (i.e. establishment Republicans).[39] Despite no news conferences, press releases, and little fundraising, the candidate secured 43 percent of the delegate vote– much more than the 30 percent required to get on the primary ballot– compared to the 57 percent of delegates voting for the incumbent Campbell.[40] 1997 was also the first time that trust in the party organization was truly rattled, due in large part to the proclivity of Curtis to antagonize his own Republican members. Several Republicans in the General Assembly expressed trepidation about their re-election campaigns, knowing that Curtis– who threatened his Republican elected officials with a "holy war"– would actively recruit hardline social conservatives to challenge them in a primary where the deck is stacked against them.[41]

In 1998, the conflict between the social conservatives and the moderate wings continued to build. A large contributor to this tension was the emergence of independent expenditure groups, who could spend unlimited amounts of money on providing "educational messages."[42] The Colorado Christian Coalition, led by executive director Johnathan Hotaling, was particularly effective in utilizing their resources to gain influence inside the party. Hotaling states that the Christian Coalition hosted several seminars, informing hundreds of its supporters where and when to attend caucuses and elect their delegates.[43] Other groups, like Rocky Mountain Gun Owners (a pro-gun group) and Citizens for Responsible Government (an anti-abortion activist group), used mailings and phone calls to target voters they want to see at specific caucuses: a

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[35] Blake, Peter. "GOP May Evict Elected Officials." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, June 18, 1997: 39A.

[36] Blake, Peter. "Religion, Politics Keep GOP Split." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, June 25, 1997: 43A.

[37] Brown, Fred. "Ideological schism in state GOP shows no signs of healing." *The Denver Post*, September 21, 1997: B-05.

[38] Blake, Peter. "Split In GOP Gets Physical." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, October 1, 1997: 38A.

[39] Blake, Peter. "Eggert Lying Low, But He's Serious About Senate Race." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, October 26, 1997: 4B.

[40] Blake, Peter. "Campbell's Rival Comes On Strong." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, April 22, 1998: 43A; Sanko, John. "Campbell Primary Foe Emerges - Attorney Bill Eggert Wins Spot On Ballot With 43 Percent Vote At State GOP Assembly." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, May 31, 1998: 22A.

[41] Anton, Genevieve. "Some in Colorado GOP fear new chairman will wreck party." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, March 12, 1998: 1.

[42] Blake, Peter. "GOP `Educators' Try New Tactic." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, October 15, 1997: 41A.

[43] Hubbard, Burt. "Open Season On Republican Moderates - Conservative Crusade Targets Legislators." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, May 11, 1998: 4A.

Republican elected official noted that these statewide groups, headquartered out of Denver or Colorado Springs, can influence local elections throughout the state.[44]

The blurring of lines between these independent groups and the socially conservative-led Colorado GOP came to a head. The leader of the anti-abortion activist group Citizens for Responsible Government was hired by the Colorado GOP to lead the party's get-out-the-vote efforts, yet was allowed to continue the ongoing attempts to discredit and undermine the careers of several moderate Republican elected officials.[45] Curtis fired the party's executive director and promptly absorbed the job's roles and responsibilities as his own.[46] Among other charges, the fallout between the executive director and Curtis revealed that:

The party provided the names of Republicans who attended previous precinct caucuses…to an outside firm that polled activists about their stands on abortion, gun rights, unions and taxes. Only the most conservative respondents received postcards encouraging them to attend the 1998 caucuses. Former state GOP chairman Bain remembers being asked such questions by a polling firm right before the Denver County assembly. "The poll was clearly done for a hard-right conservative customer," said Bain, who never received a postcard from the party.[47]

Despite accusations of undue influence in the primary process and financial mismanagement of the party, members of the Colorado GOP were unable to remove Curtis in line with the procedures outlined in the party bylaws. Curtis disparaged the purpose of the executive committee,[48] refused to call meetings (the bylaws required eight executive committee meetings per year),[49] denied attempts to hold meetings meant to scrutinize his role in the party's primaries and financial situation, and changed the locks at the party headquarters to prevent meetings from taking place.[50] When Curtis eventually called a meeting under his own terms, he tried to remove two county chairs, arguing that the most recent version of the bylaws (which allowed county chairs to attend executive committee meetings) had not been filed yet with the Secretary of State and therefore weren't valid (per the bylaws, it is the chair's job to file the paperwork).[51] Ultimately, Curtis voluntarily declined to run again for chair and accepted a job as a daytime radio talk show host in 1999.

Once Steve Curtis stepped down as chair, moderate Republican mayor and businessman Bob Greenlee reinstated the Republican Leadership Program to train new waves of leaders.[52] The Republican Leadership Program was hosted sporadically in the 1990s but was brought back in the wake of Steve Curtis' tenure to replace departing members of the party organization with

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Blake, Peter. "Pat Miller Gets GOP Contract." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, June 24, 1998: 42A.

[46] Thomsen, Scott. "Director of state GOP fired for campaign participation." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, July 30, 1998: 6.

[47] Anton, Genevieve. "Colorado GOP in uproar as primary nears - Chairman on 'conservative jihad,' fired director says." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, August 6, 1998: 1.

[48] Anton, Genevieve. "GOP fissure may trigger investigation - Party's finances are in dire straits." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, August 14, 1998: 1.

[49] Blake, Peter. "The State GOP's Runaway Phone." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, August 12, 1998: 40A.

[50] Anton, Genevieve. "GOP chief stymies probe - Financial problems of state party overblown, Curtis says." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, August 15, 1998: 1.

[51] Anton, Genevieve. "GOP oversight committee orders audit of state party - Republican boss still has job." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, August 22, 1998: 1.

[52] Brown, Fred. "GOP jump-starts leadership program." *The Denver Post*, August 26, 1999: B-05.

ones emphasizing "big-tent issues rather than divisive ones."[53] The program was very successful in providing a pipeline for aspiring politicians: among many others, graduates of this program in 2000, 2001 and 2002 include future state senators Kevin Lundberg and Dennis Hisey; future Secretaries of State Scott Gessler and Wayne Williams; and future state party Chair Ryan Call.[54] After a stoppage in the program in 2003, the program was taken up by former U.S. Representative Bob Schaffer and renamed the Leadership Program of the Rockies.[55] Throughout the early 2000s, the Colorado Republican Party appeared to re-embrace "big tent" Republicanism and were competitive in elections across the state.

The Tea Party caucus insurgency in Colorado

The 2010 Republican gubernatorial primary boiled down to conservative political newcomer Dan Maes and former mainstream U.S. Representative Scott McInnis. An independent poll of likely Republican voters released in September of 2009 revealed that McInnis had 40 percent of the hypothetical vote, state Senator Josh Penry had 13 percent, and 47 percent were undecided– Maes was not considered competitive.[56] In the beginning of 2010, Maes reported less than six dollars in his campaign account (compared to almost half a million dollars for McInnis).[57] Despite these disadvantages, Maes edged out McInnis by sixteen votes at the state convention that May.[58] Establishment party chair Dick Wadhams estimated that over half of the 3,000 delegates at the convention were first-time attendees.[59] Maes later went on to defeat McInnis in the primary in August by a few thousand votes. Despite emerging as the victor of both the state convention delegate vote and the Republican Party primary, however, Maes never received financial support from the state or national Republican parties. His campaign was quickly abandoned by any remaining organizations after archconservative U.S. Representative Tom Tancredo entered the race as a third-party candidate: in August 2010, Maes raised $50,201 to Tancredo's $198,820.[60]

While the Tea Party clearly influenced the Republican primary, it is more difficult to claim that the Tea Party in Colorado had an effect on the general election during this period. Like Maes, U.S. Senate candidate Ken Buck relied on grassroots Tea Party support to defeat the

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Names of elected officials and party leaders collected from the Leadership Program of the Rockies website, which publishes alumni rosters by graduation year.

[55] Blake, Peter. "Paying For Parsimony." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, July 30, 2003: 43A.

[56] Toda, Dean. "Poll has McInnis way ahead of Penry." *Gazette, The: Blogs (Colorado Springs, CO)*, September 24, 2009.

[57] Bean, Joanna and Tom Roeder. "'Time For Some Republican Leadership In Colorado'." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, May 2, 2010: Local 1.

[58] Cerveny, Ian. "Tea Party dominates state GOP Assembly." *Denver Examiner (CO)*, May 24, 2010.

[59] Bartels, Lynn. "Republican Party Assembly - Maes, Buck ride tide of GOP discontent - Conservative activists shake up the race for the Senate and governor, but history shows a primary victory isn't assured." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, May 23, 2010: A-22.

[60] Crummy, Karen E. "Cash-poor Maes campaign suffers more blows." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, September 9, 2010: A-01.

establishment choice at the state convention and secure the Republican nomination,[61] only to lose to the Democratic candidate in the general election. In cases where Tea Party-supported candidates won in general elections, the candidates had previously served in elective office, undermining any claims that the Tea Party played any significant role in their re-elections. For example, U.S. Representatives Doug Lamborn and Mike Coffman may have been founding members of the Tea Party Caucus in Congress in 2010, but each ran as incumbents without primary challengers from among the most conservative districts in Colorado.

The Tea Party seemingly provided little to boost Republicans over Democratic candidates in the general election, but the Tea Party still exhibited enormous influence at the precinct, county, and state meetings for the 2010 election cycle. The Tea Party made a concerted statewide effort to elect their members as assembly delegates. In fact, evidence of deliberately organizing to achieve this goal can be found in the year prior: in a 2009 op-ed, Tom Tancredo called on members of the Tea Party and the 9-12 Project to "take over the Republican Party."[62] Tancredo asserts that doing so is "not a difficult task" because many Republicans in the state are conservatives: he simply asks members of these networks to attend the Republican precinct caucuses in March, county assemblies in April, and the state convention in May.[63] Tancredo concludes by reminding conservatives to register as Republican if they hadn't already, and informs readers about classes (run by leaders in the 9-12 movement) teaching how to run for precinct delegate and to become more active and effective.[64] Ironically, Tancredo's letter also espoused the value of staying within the two-party framework, and said that launching a third party campaign or backing one of the smaller existing ones would be "suicidal"-- mere months before launching his own third party campaign in protest of the Republican nomination of Maes.[65]

Reports of the 2010 Republican caucuses reveal the mechanisms through which organized members can quickly achieve political influence within the party. The exact number of precinct meetings held by Colorado Republicans across the state is unclear, but there were 403 meetings in El Paso County (Colorado's most populous county) alone.[66] Meeting attendance numbers, on the other hand, indicate that the copious amounts of meetings amount to very little actual participation. For example, Fremont County (with a population of 50,000 people) had around 600 attendees spread across 30 Republican precinct caucuses,[67] and Morgan County (with a population of about 30,000 people) had less than 150 participants combined across its 17 precincts.[68] If these attendance rates appear low, party veterans frequently observed that attendance in 2010 was much higher than in previous years, even compared to the most recent 2008 election cycle.[69] One Republican party veteran noted that the Denver district they belonged

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[61] Fender, Jessica. "Primary Politics - Tea Party's impact blunted - Despite the protests, GOP voter rolls aren't overflowing. They've shrunk, but so have Democrats'." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, June 20, 2010: B-01.

[62] Baker, Kathleen. "Tom Tancredo's open letter to Colorado's 912 activists and Tea Party patriots." *Denver Examiner (CO)*, December 23, 2009.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Roeder, Tom and Eileen Welsome. "Operation caucus - local partisan events narrow down prospects." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, March 7, 2010: A1.

[67] Canterbury, Carie. "Party Time." *Daily Record, The (Cañon City, CO)*, March 17, 2010: 1.

[68] Barker, Dan. "Caucuses: Split for Dems, not GOP." *Fort Morgan Times (CO)*, March 17, 2010.

[69] Canterbury, Carie. "Party Time." *Daily Record, The (Cañon City, CO)*, March 17, 2010: 1.

to had 43 attendees spread across 38 precincts– and that this was more than double the amount that showed up in 2008.[70]

Colorado's county assemblies bring together two delegates from each precinct regardless of the attendance at each precinct caucus. For example, the Rio Blanco County Assembly consisted of 50 delegates voting to send 11 delegates and 10 alternates to the state convention.[71] In this way, a concentrated effort to recruit voters to attend specific precinct caucuses can snowball into an immediate presence at the county level, and this process may continue on to the district and state conventions. The smaller number of participating members at the county level could create a disproportionately loud voice among the newly elected precinct delegates, and outside groups seemed privy to this information. One 9-12 Project group, for example, trained fifty of its members to attend caucuses in El Paso County. Across the state, 9-12 groups and Tea Party networks are said to have recruited hundreds of conservatives to attend caucuses.[72] Crucially, their goal was not to pick specific candidates, but to pursue precinct leadership positions and elect like-minded delegates.[73]

Targeting higher levels of party control at the hyper-local level is a far cry from the original intent of the precinct caucuses. A former county commissioner and party official recalls that neighborhood caucuses used to be personal and candidate-specific: candidates used to canvass neighbors to attend and help nominate them for office.[74] However, nominating candidates and electing delegates at the same caucus increasingly shunted the former's importance aside in favor of the latter.[75] Groups at the state and national level, like Rocky Mountain Gun Owners,[76] recognized the ability of delegates to infiltrate up through the party by targeting local precincts and prioritizing the election of like-minded delegates. This strategy was later employed by Ron Paul and Rick Santorum supporters in the 2012 Republican primary. In an effort to protest Mitt Romney (who by then had already secured the nomination), slates of delegates opposing Romney were funneled up through the grassroots of the party to the state convention, where their aim was to humiliate Romney and remind him to adhere to conservative values.[77]

Through the gains made at the grassroots level, the emergent Tea Party wing worked to gradually move the party leadership to the right. Three chairmen served during the period from 2008 to 2016. Establishment Republican Dick Wadhams was elected in 2007 and 2009 but stepped down in 2011. Wadhams cited the ideological battles within the party and the lack of others' understanding of how to run the party organization effectively as the reasons for not seeking reelection.[78] The main opposition Wadhams would have faced was a Tea Party favorite backed by Tom Tancredo; however, Ryan Call, the former counsel for the state party, beat the

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[70] Taylor, Richard. "Precinct caucus night in Denver." *Denver Examiner (CO)*, March 16, 2010.

[71] Burkhead, Jeff. "County assembly narrows field for primary." *Rio Blanco Herald Times (Meeker, CO)*, April 15, 2010: 1A, 6A.

[72] Roeder, Tom. "Move on over, mainstreamers." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, March 16, 2010: A1.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Personal interview, September 2024.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Hubbard, Burt. "Open Season On Republican Moderates - Conservative Crusade Targets Legislators." *Rocky Mountain News (CO)*, May 11, 1998: 4A.

[77] Bartels, Lynn. "Upset in delegate elections." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, April 15, 2012: 6B.

[78] Bartels, Lynn. "Wadhams won't run again for GOP chair." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, February 8, 2011: A-01.

Tea Party candidate handily for the chairmanship and served until 2015.[79] Call was pestered by Tea Party groups during his tenure as chair, and his loss in the 2015 chair election marked the first time in almost a century that a Colorado GOP chair lost his reelection bid.[80] His successor, Steve House, served from 2015 to 2017 and was preferred by the more conservative wing of the party.[81]

The Colorado GOP's embrace of Donald Trump

Chairman Steve House faced pressure from both wings of the party almost immediately upon his election in 2015. The conservative Republican leaders that supported House over Call called for House to resign mere weeks later over an alleged extramarital affair. House claimed the calls for resignation were in response to him not hiring their preferred choice for political director of the party, and each side threatened the other with litigation.[82] A vote of confidence from the party executive committee allowed House to carry on as chair, although his alliances to the conservative wing that elected him were now severed.[83]

In advance of the 2016 primary, the Colorado Republican Party removed the presidential straw poll from its caucus procedures.[84] State party leaders incorrectly claimed that RNC rule changes in 2012 required binding elected delegates to caucus straw poll winners. Later, leaders like House admitted they weren't aware that if the straw poll winner dropped out of the race, the delegates would simply become unbound.[85] The national committeeman at the time worried that removing the straw poll would "leave tens of thousands of potential Republican straw-poll voters on the sidelines"; former chair Wadhams echoes this sentiment, calling this decision a mistake that ultimately hurts the genuine grassroots of the party.[86]

Under the Colorado caucus system in 2016, only 13 of the state party's 37 national delegates were determined at the state convention. The rest were allocated at each congressional district convention, held weeks prior to the state convention. Republicans backing Ted Cruz took advantage of this knowledge and employed a similar bottom-up strategy as the Tea Party did in 2010. Hardline conservative groups like Rocky Mountain Gun Owners worked quietly behind the scenes to recruit like-minded Republicans to attend the precinct caucuses.[87] The ability to navigate "byzantine" delegate rules paid off in dividends for what has been described as a

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[79] Bartels, Lynn. "GOP chair elected in one round - The first vote is a clear win for Ryan Call, the party's legal counsel." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, March 27, 2011: B-02.

[80] Bartels, Lynn. "House shakes state's GOP." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, April 12, 2015: 3B.

[81] Bunch, Joey. "Colo. GOP seeks unity." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, December 20, 2015: 1B.

[82] Moreno, Ivan. "Colorado GOP committee backs chair in blackmail scandal." *Associated Press State Wire: Colorado (CO)*, June 26, 2015.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Tanksalvala, Sarah. "What to expect at the Colorado caucuses." *Denver Examiner (CO)*, February 18, 2016.

[85] Frank, John. "2nd look at caucus change - New questions over state GOP's shift raise doubts." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, August 30, 2015: 4B.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Montellaro, Zach. "Cruz and Trump Try to Win Over Uncommitted Colorado Delegates." *National Journal: Hotline Latest Edition (USA)*, March 29, 2016.

"super-decentralized system."[88] Other organizations on the ground at this time include Gun Owners of America, Tea Party networks, the Faith and Freedom Coalition of Colorado, the Republican National Coalition for Life, and U.S. Representative Ken Buck, the Tea Party favorite who eventually helmed the Cruz campaign in Colorado.[89] Cruz essentially won the state months before the national campaigns turned their attention to Colorado.[90] None of the official campaigns for Cruz, Donald Trump, or John Kasich had a large presence in Colorado until the lead-up to the state convention.[91]

Trump and his campaign almost immediately called the results of the Colorado caucuses rigged,[92] asserting that the process by which delegates were selected in the state's assemblies and caucuses weren't accessible enough and that it favored "party insiders."[93] Chair Steve House, who was accused of bias toward Cruz and received death threats, promised greater transparency measures in the future.[94] Regardless, Colorado's delegation to the 2016 took up the mantle of fighting against Trump's Republican nomination. The strategy revolved around working to unbind delegates from state primaries that Trump won; the Republican National Convention's rules committee denied any proposed changes to delegation rules. At the RNC, Colorado led the "Never Trump" movement on the floor and walked out to protest the national party's strong-arm tactics to try to unite around Trump.[95] They fought to recruit other state delegations to petition for a roll-call vote on the rules surrounding delegates. Despite initially procuring a petition of nine states (two more than the seven required), three states withdrew amid "arm-twisting" from the Trump camp.[96] Colorado's delegation was relocated far away from the convention stage, and Trump's nomination was made official.[97]

From 2016 to 2024, there have been five chairs of the Colorado GOP. These chair elections have been much more closely contested than in the decade prior. In each instance, candidates tend to fall along two dimensions: the degree of their support for Trump, and their approach toward the state primary. After 2020, election denialism was also pushed to the forefront of party leadership consideration. Undeniably, each successive chair was more conservative than their predecessor. As of 2024, Dave Williams is the current chair of the Colorado GOP. Since his election as chair in 2023, Williams has been embroiled in controversy for attacking establishment Republican elected officials and candidates,[98] using party funds to

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[88] Oldham, Jennifer. "Wide-open Colorado convention is a Republican delegate rodeo." *Daily News (Bowling Green, KY)*, April 22, 2016.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Frank, John. "Trump blasts the Colorado GOP vote." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, April 11, 2016: 6A.
[91] Oldham, Jennifer. "Wide-open Colorado convention is a Republican delegate rodeo." *Daily News (Bowling Green, KY)*, April 22, 2016.
[92] Schrader, Megan. "Caucus critics seek change." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, April 13, 2016: A1.
[93] Frank, John. "Trump blasts the Colorado GOP vote." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, April 11, 2016: 6A.
[94] Frank, John. "State GOP chairman House won't seek second term." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, January 24, 2017: 4A.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Frank, John. "Colorado upstarts spark 'family feud'." *Denver Post, The (CO)*, July 19, 2016: 6A.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Luning, Ernest. "Ex-GOP county chair quits Colorado state party's governing board, cites attacks on fellow Republicans." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, December 15, 2023.

benefit his own primary campaign (in spite of other Republicans running for the same seat),[99] and making inflammatory statements about the media, LGBT groups, and the 2020 election results.[100]

Conclusion

The Colorado Republican Party has been at the whims of extreme interests for much of its recent history. Socially conservative, anti-abortion groups openly fought against Republican elected officials in the 1990s and eventually took control of the state party. In 2010, the Tea Party movement ran rampant through the state GOP from the precinct meetings upward. While the Tea Party scored no large victories in electing their candidates, arguably nowhere else has the Tea Party movement been as successful at shifting the party's ideological stances as they have in Colorado. The push for Ted Cruz in the state and arguments against Donald Trump as the 2016 Republican nominee were powerful but short-lived. Over the course of Trump's term, the party continually elected leaders that espoused extreme positions and publicly doted on Trump's presidency. The extreme wing of the Colorado GOP, now in firm control of the party, continues to fight to exclude unaffiliated voters from their primary elections and to ostracize any fellow Republicans who do not share identical political views.

In this chapter, I pointed toward the changing political context of Colorado and the party's assembly system as explanations for the state party's misfortunes. Election laws in the state reduce the role of the state parties to poorly-funded electioneering clubs; consequently, the influence of independent expenditure groups far exceeds the capabilities of the state parties. The state parties are siloed off and left to their own devices, leaving them more vulnerable to swift changes in organizational structure. Furthermore, as the electorate becomes increasingly unaffiliated, the Democratic Party has welcomed unaffiliated voters into their primary systems, while the Republican Party has responded with open hostility and litigation. The Colorado GOP's assembly system, meanwhile, may be originally designed to promote the grassroots but has been vulnerable to outside organizations. Groups like Rocky Mountain Gun Owners, for example, have reliably targeted the party's precinct meetings to achieve their specific interests multiple times over the past few decades– with little care for the welfare of the state party itself. The state party has been an easy target for groups seeking to achieve their ideological goals via bylaws changes, leadership elections and securing preferred delegates to the RNC.

The Colorado GOP represents one of the strongest cases in support of the dissertation's three hypotheses, despite being a stark counterfactual to cases like in Utah or Kentucky. A Colorado state government ambivalent to the state parties, as well as an outright hostile relationship between the state GOP and its Republican elected officials in recent years, supports the inverse of state-level institutions hypothesis: weaker ties between these groups of political actors result in a shaky party organization vulnerable to intraparty conflict and party takeover. Similarly, the design of the state party itself renders the organization wide open to outside groups with ulterior motives, like stacking the Colorado delegation in favor of a particular presidential

[99] Luning, Ernest. "Republicans rip Colorado GOP chair Dave Williams over use of party resources to attack primary rival." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, March 3, 2024.
[100] Luning, Ernest. "A dozen county Republican parties join move to oust Colorado GOP Chairman Dave Williams over Pride Month attacks." *Gazette, The (Colorado Springs, CO)*, June 10, 2024.

candidate—strongly supporting the state party hypothesis. Finally, Colorado Republican losses have piled up in the 21st century to the point of electoral nonviability, leading to frequent intraparty conflict over which party faction gains control of the party's proverbial steering wheel. Therefore, I find support for the party competition hypothesis: in a state with one-party dominance, factional conflict appears much more frequently in Colorado.

Under the influence of many national Republican movements in its history, the Colorado Republican Party is one of the clearest state-level victims of the dual forces of nationalization and polarization across the parties in the dissertation. The party's leadership elections boil down to the candidates embracing the Trump agenda, and voting members appear to exclusively back candidates mirroring Trump's national Republican trends (in lieu of promoting any candidates with Colorado-specific political stances.) Colorado's regulation of the state parties and the state party's fight against allowing unaffiliated voters into the Republican primary further keeps them insulated against any diversity of viewpoints. A combination of poor organizational capacity, nonexistent fundraising ability and frequent leadership changes leads successful, establishment Republican elected officials in the state to avoid affiliation with the state party altogether, further worsening the state party's outlook.

The future for the Colorado GOP is unclear. On one hand, controversial alt-right chair Dave Williams declined to seek another term in early 2025 and may be replaced by someone with a stronger desire to loosen the party's ideological rigidity. Given Williams' actions during his tenure, it seems likely that the state party has reached its nadir and can only improve in the near future. On the other hand, the explanations I have provided lending to the state party's weaknesses are deeper-seated than a single leadership election. Without changes to how delegates are selected– from the precinct meetings to the state's delegation to the RNC– the state party will continue to be vulnerable to outside groups. Furthermore (and despite their ability to participate in the Republican primary), the state party leadership's public and protracted fight to exclude unaffiliated voters limits their viability as a party brand that can compete across the state in future elections.

Chapter 6: California Republican Party

Introduction

The California Republican Party was chosen from a pool of state GOPs that registered "High" in intraparty conflict during the Christian Right, but "Low" in both the Tea Party and Trump eras. California's state political system is largely predicated on Progressive Era ideas from over a century ago, tending to weaken the parties in favor of direct democracy and candidate-centered campaigns. On the other hand, the sheer size of the state necessitates the creation of a highly stratified party structure with active organizations at the local, county, district, regional, and state level; additionally, California state law gives parties latitude in how to structure and govern themselves.[1] The potentially diverse coalition of Republican voices in the state has instead given way to perpetual intraparty conflict involving the party's deeply conservative wing, who prioritize ideological purity and insularity over winning elections. First, social conservatives took control of the party in the 1990s. While they succeeded at changing the party platform and alienating Republicans lacking strong pro-life views, the socially conservative wing failed to improve Republican electoral chances in the state.

While the religious right faction of the party eventually faded, the strong undercurrent of a deeply conservative wing remained. Therefore, the Tea Party movement struggled to find any foothold among conservative California Republican circles. The California GOP had many members supporting Ron Paul in 2008, and many of the existing conservative leaders in the state, like Jon Fleischman and Ron Nehring, simply accepted this new "Tea Party" label in 2010 without any actual ideological movement. Similarly to the social conservatives in the 1990s, candidates running with Tea Party support fared no better than other Republicans in electoral contests. Finally, the California Republican Party has adopted a relatively uncommon stance toward Donald Trump: while remaining firmly focused on California state politics and promoting their own party brand, the California GOP has nonetheless made changes to benefit Trump in 2020 and 2024. In this chapter, I argue that California state law and the state GOP's bylaws contribute to a weak party system with many opportunities for grassroots conservatives to make inroads. However, recent changes to the design of the state party have weakened grassroots' prospects for party control over time. Statewide, the California GOP's intrinsic connection to the national Republican Party contributes heavily to its unpopularity among the state's electorate.

Several elements of California's political system work against its political parties. Voters approved a blanket primary in the 1990s and a top two primary in the 2010s, removing much of the parties' ability to influence elections vis-à-vis candidate recruitment and nominations. Furthermore, the disparity in Republican registered voters has created situations where two Democratic candidates advance to the general election, leaving Republican candidates off the ballot entirely. California's campaign finance requirements are also tougher for the parties and candidates than in many other states. All told, the dissertation's state-level institutions hypothesis is supported in the case of California. Organizational design decisions within the state GOP further undercut the party at the state level, also supporting my state party hypothesis. For

[1] E.g. Lawson, Kay. "Challenging Regulation of Political Parties: The California Case." *JL & Pol.* 2. 1985.

instance, its presidential primaries gave each congressional district three delegates until 2020, which elevated the district-level parties above the state party for candidates strategizing to win the state. Party bylaws changes in the last few election cycles, however, appear to reverse this trend; for example, the way that the state central committee allocates members tends to benefit larger counties and its elected officials. Broadly speaking, the California Republican party's actions in the past several election cycles indicate an organizational reset from the ground up.

Out of all the state parties covered in this dissertation, the California Republican Party may be the greatest victim of being inextricably linked to the national Republican platform. In particular, Republican policies on immigration fare exceptionally poorly in California– a majority-minority state with the largest population of Mexican-Americans in the country. As a result, California's electorate heavily favors Democratic candidates in partisan elections and the Republican brand is unpopular even to moderates in the state. This is evidenced by the high number of decline-to-state voters in California (which briefly eclipsed the number of registered Republicans in the state in 2018), as well as the disproportionate amount of success that Republican candidates experience in nonpartisan, local elections. The state GOP in recent years appears to be aware of this and seems reluctant to adhere unconditionally to the national, pro-Trump Republican Party agenda as seen in other state parties.

Background Information

California			
California Elections		California Republican Party	
Primary type	Closed (-1998, 2008) Semi-closed (2000-, excluding 2008) Nonpresidential blanket primary (1998-2000) Nonpresidential top two primary (2012-)	**State party officer elections**	Elected by state central committee
Presidential/state primaries	Combined event	**State party officer elections schedule**	Odd-numbered years
Presidential delegate allocation	Winner-take-all by congressional district (-2016) Winner-take-most with winner-take-all trigger (2020-)	**State party convention cycle**	Odd-numbered years
State election cycle	Even-numbered, non-presidential years	**Pre-primary endorsements**	No - banned with few exceptions

Population growth in California peaked in the 1980s and early 1990s, although it has significantly stagnated by the mid-2000s and declined for the first time in 2021.[2] Regionally, many of California's metropolitan areas have declined (particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic) and rural counties in the Central Valley and the deserts have grown.[3] In addition to being the most populous state, California is one of the few majority-minority states in the country. California has the largest population of Hispanic or Latino Americans, the largest population of Asian Americans,[4] and the second lowest white population in terms of proportion.[5] Similar to its white population, California's evangelical population ranks near the bottom across all states when expressed as a proportion of total population; however, the estimated 8 million evangelicals in California is the largest among all states.[6]

Democrats' voter registration advantage in California is more attributable to the exodus of Republicans as opposed to an influx of Democrats. In 1988, Democrats led Republicans in registered voters 51 to 38 percent.[7] The gap in registration stayed fairly consistent through the beginning of the 21st century, although the number of unaffiliated voters rose steadily. From 2006 to 2018, Republicans lost registered voters every election cycle while Democratic registration continued to grow.[8] 2018 marks a low point for the California GOP: more voters registered as unaffiliated (28 percent) than as Republicans (24 percent).[9] 2022 voter registration statistics show the Republican party gaining voters again, although the disparity between the two parties is at its greatest: 47 percent Democratic, 24 percent Republican, and 23 percent unaffiliated.[10]

Both of California's major political parties claimed successes throughout the 20th century. California voters reliably chose the Republican presidential candidate in every election until 1992, and elected three Republican governors that served full terms in office: Ronald Reagan, George Deukmejian, and Pete Wilson. Democrats maintained solid majorities in the state legislature and the U.S. House delegation, as well as electing Jerry Brown in the 1970s. However, immigration became a focal issue in California politics in the 1990s. Proposition 187, approved by voters in 1994, denied public services to illegal immigrants and created procedures for reporting them to state and federal authorities. Elected officials who tied themselves to it– notably, Republican Governor Pete Wilson– were handily reelected.[11] With the increase in the Latino population in California throughout the 1990s and beyond, Proposition 187 is thought to

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Castleman, Terry. "California population winners and losers: Why some counties boomed and others shrank." *The Los Angeles Times*. April 5, 2023.

[4] U.S. Census Bureau.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Evangelical Protestant - Rankings by Area (States)." The Association of Religion Data Archives. 2020.

[7] Peterson, Larry. "Unregistered voters are now leaning to GOP." *The Orange County Register*, February 1, 1988: A01.

[8] Voter Registration Statistics. California Secretary of State.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Safire, William. "Breaking Ranks: Politics and Principle Divide GOP Leaders." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PA)*, October 28, 1994: C-3.

have alienated Latinos who may otherwise be drawn to the Republican party, contributing to the upending of two-party politics in the state to the benefit of Democratic candidates.[12]

Political science research from the 20th century captures more of the two-party competition of old. Like many Western states, Elazar (1966) classifies California as a "moralistic" state with lofty goals for government welfare programs and an engaged citizenry opting for them.[13] Notably, Sharkansky's (1969) methodology rates California to be the most developed on his unidimensional political culture scale out of all Western states.[14] Mayhew (1986) also seems to capture California's uniqueness among its regional peers-- though in this case, to assign it a 1 out of 5 for TPO-- due to California's embrace of Progressive traditions, which directly neutralizes party organizations.[15] Finally, Gibson et al. (1983) places the California GOP over the California Democratic Party for its organizational strength, although they measured both parties to be above average nation-wide.[16]

The last notable California Republican elected to office was Arnold Schwarzenegger, who ran in the recall election to replace unpopular Democratic Governor Gray Davis in 2003. Schwarzenegger emerged from a crowded ballot of over one hundred candidates and benefited from name recognition and from many prominent politicians declining to run.[17] Schwarzenegger was term-limited in 2010: in the open gubernatorial election, Democrat Jerry Brown defeated Republican Meg Whitman by over twelve percentage points. In spite of the Tea Party movement occurring nationally and a midterm year for the Obama administration, the 2010 elections in California produced few successes for Republicans. Republicans also lost the lieutenant governorship, a couple of state house seats, and one U.S. House seat.

Republicans haven't won any statewide positions since Schwarzenegger, and both chambers of the state legislature have been under dominant Democratic control. The top two primary has led to the exclusion of Republican candidates in statewide general elections, including both U.S. Senate elections in 2016 and 2018. The closest statewide victory Republicans could claim in recent times is launching the recall election for Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom in 2021. Republican groups facilitated the petition that would become the recall election for Newsom, although Newsom would be re-confirmed as governor by over three million votes and 23 percentage points.

Election and primary laws

California's history of primary elections is convoluted. California's primaries were closed until the 1998 elections. Voters approved Proposition 198 in 1996 to replace California's primaries with a blanket primary, although *California Democratic Party v. Jones* (2000) struck Proposition 198 down as unconstitutional. After only two election cycles with the blanket

[12] Hui, Iris, and David O. Sears. "Reexamining the effect of racial propositions on Latinos' partisanship in California." *Political Behavior* 40 (2018): 149-174.
[13] Elazar, Daniel Judah. "American federalism: A view from the states." 1966.
[14] Sharkansky, Ira. "The utility of Elazar's political culture: A research note." *Polity* 2, no. 1 (1969): 66-83. 1969.
[15] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986.
[16] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.
[17] Downey, Dave. "Fringe candidates have little chance." *North County Times (Escondido, CA)*, August 23, 2003.

primary (1998 and 2000), semi-closed primaries were implemented from 2002 through the 2010 elections. The California GOP closed their presidential primary in 2008, but the state primary continued to allow decline-to-state voters in this period. An altered version of the blanket primary, the top two primary, was approved by voters in 2010 after *Washington State Grange v. Washington State Republican Party et al. (2008)* upheld Washington's top two primary system. The key change from the blanket primary was allowing voters to choose candidates without having to affiliate with the parties themselves.

Until recently, it was enshrined in California law that primary elections were to be held in early June– but on a per-year basis, the California General Assembly moved up the 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 primary dates. A 2017 law permanently moved California's presidential primaries to March, matching other states conducting their primaries on Super Tuesday. The Republican primary in California is traditionally decentralized to dozens of individual contests, one for each congressional district. Delegates were allocated proportionally within each district until 2004, when the candidate with the most votes in each district would now win all three delegates from that district. A small handful of at-large delegates are also pledged to the candidate winning the most votes across the entire state. As of the 2024 primary, however, any candidate securing over 50 percent of the primary vote automatically wins all delegates from the state. The California delegates attending the RNC are traditionally chosen by the presidential candidates themselves, not by the party.[18]

All statewide elected offices are elected in non-presidential years, including separate races for governor and lieutenant governor. Term limits for statewide officers and state legislators were implemented throughout the 1990s. In 2012, a citizen initiative imposed a different type of term limits on the entire California General Assembly: state legislators are now limited to twelve years of combined total service in either chamber. As evidenced by changes to California's primaries and term limits for its elected officials, both citizen-led and legislatively-referred ballot propositions are an active part of the political process in the state. California also permits recall elections for any elected official, the most prominent of which were conducted in 2003 and 2021.

A ballot proposition in 1974 created the basis for campaign finance laws in California. Another proposition, passed by voters in 1988, placed limits on campaign contributions and banned the use of public money for campaigns. Across all fifty states, California ranks near the top in terms of campaign finance transparency and regulation.[19] Campaign contributions are highly detailed and subject to significant disclosure procedures. These campaign finance laws apply tiers of limits to candidates depending on the office sought, from governor to city- and county-level positions.[20] Notably, individual, PAC, corporate, and union contributions have limits imposed, but state parties alone are able to spend unlimited amounts of money on all non-city and non-county races– a potentially massive boon to a state party system that is otherwise limited in several other ways by California state law.[21]

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[18] Siders, David. "How Republicans and Democrats pick California delegates to conventions." *Sacramento Bee, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, April 13, 2016.

[19] "The State Campaign Finance Index 2022". *Coalition for Integrity*. 2022.

[20] National Conference of State Legislatures.

[21] Ibid.

Party rules and bylaws

Static features

California's embrace of ballot initiatives, legislative referenda, and the power to recall elected officials combine to make changes to California political system more frequent than in other states. Division 7, Part 3 of California's Elections Code focuses entirely on the California Republican Party. General requirements for the state party are listed, although a majority of the statutes list procedures for the county-level Republican parties. Features of the state party's bylaws formally grant privileges to Republican elected officials–and even Republican nominees who do not win their elections.

The sheer size of the state is matched by a heavily stratified party organizational structure. In addition to parties at the local, county, and district level, the party also divides the state into eight regions that are controlled by vice chairs of the party. Finally, the state is bisected into a northern and southern half, with several bylaws in place intended to produce equal representation from each. At the state level, the California GOP is led by a state central committee, an executive committee, a board of directors, and party officers.

In the California GOP, state central committee members are similar to convention delegates found in other state parties: they meet once a year to determine officer elections and conduct other party business. California's state central committee, however, is unique for its vast numbers of appointed delegates, numbering in the hundreds. Each Republican elected official (including all state legislators from either chamber, statewide elected offices, and members of either U.S. Congressional chamber) is given eight to twelve appointments (depending on the office held). The chair and other officers, previous chair, and chartered volunteer organizations each receive a handful of appointments. The lion's share of the committee's appointed members come from the counties: each county party chair receives at least four appointments and larger counties are rewarded additional delegates. Finally, Republican nominees for any partisan elective office receive at least one appointment, so long as they received at least 30 percent of the vote in their election. Nominees, volunteer organizations, and county parties may also earn more appointments based on a voter registration bounty program.

The executive committee of the party consists of a subset of one hundred members from the larger state central committee. Members include the state party officers, nominees or elected Republicans for statewide positions, representatives from the state legislature, area chairman selected by counties, and appointments made by each regional vice chair. The executive committee accepts all of the responsibilities of the larger state central committee. There is no meeting requirement for the executive committee: it can only be called to a meeting by the chair. The purpose of the executive committee is to be a more easily mobilized version of the central committee in the event that special meetings or conventions need to be scheduled.

The California Republican Party's Board of Directors consists of around two dozen members, including the twelve officers of the party (the chair, vice chair, secretary, treasurer, and eight regional vice chairs). Of the three governing bodies of the party, the board meets the most frequently at a minimum of six times per year. The board works with the chief operating officer of the party to manage central committee business and operations. The Board also confirms all appointments made by the chair and appoints the party's chief operating officer itself, although the chief operating officer serves under the chair. Finally, the board manages six

committees of its own. Committees reporting to the board include an audit committee (for the party's finances), a strategic planning committee (emphasizing future planning of five years and beyond), and a party base-building committee.

The chair of the party heads all three of the state central committee (vis a vis the annual convention), the executive committee, and the party's board of directors. They also oversee the day-to-day operations of the party, including fundraising efforts and coordinating volunteer organizations. The chair appoints the leaders and members of all seven standing committees, including a couple of members of the executive committee.

Finally, a motif of the bylaws is the California Republican Party's careful consideration to avoid declaring a symbolic base of operations in the state. In addition to the aforementioned vice chairs representing eight different regions across the state, the California GOP is also careful to seek balance in influence between the southern and northern halves of the state. For example, the annual committee meeting is split between Sacramento in odd years and anywhere in the southern part of the state in even years. Board meetings similarly alternate between the northern and southern halves of the state. Last, and although the provision was eliminated in 2018, a chair of the state party coming from northern California could only be challenged and succeeded by a candidate from southern California, and vice versa.

Dynamic features

I have located fourteen unique versions of the California Republican Party's bylaws from 1996 to 2023. The 2000 version of the bylaws is significantly different from the previous version in 1996 and reflects the modernization of the state party. The structure of the document fundamentally changed, and sections on the state party's purpose, discipline and removal of members, officers, committees, finances, and conventions were either extensively rewritten or added entirely. The impetus for such sweeping changes is unclear, although a 1999 article cites George W. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign as divisive within the party, with both pro-Bush and anti-Bush camps pushing for changes to their nomination process.[22]

Given the frequency of changes made to California's primary elections, corresponding updates to the primary and nomination process in the California GOP's bylaws is hardly surprising. I note large additions to the 2000, 2001, 2010, and 2012 bylaws in regard to the primaries, and a large removal of delegate procedures in 2005. Most of these changes are added in order to be in compliance with California state law.

Endorsements by the party are a subject of frequent debate in the bylaws. Historically, California state law banned endorsements in partisan elections until a court case struck down the law in 1988. Even after the ban was lifted, however, the state GOP only endorsed in special elections– in all other cases, the state committee, county committees, and officers were prohibited from endorsing, supporting, or opposing any candidate for a Republican nomination. Another exception was added in 2001, allowing party committees to specifically target Republican legislators who voted against the majority of Republicans attempting to pass a reapportionment or redistricting bill. With the top two primary set to affect California primary elections, however, state GOP leaders fought over issuing endorsements in an effort to reclaim any influence lost from the new primary system.

[22] Marinucci, Carla and Robert P. Gunnison. "GOP May Alter Delegate Rules In California - Amendment would scrap `winner-take-all' approach." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, June 5, 1999: A1.

The prospects of a candidate receiving the party's endorsement gradually increased beginning in 2013, and county-level candidates could seek endorsements beginning in 2018. That said, receiving the state party's endorsement is still a rigorous process, requiring the approval of any relevant county central committees, a hearing, and a two-thirds vote by the Board of Directors. Furthermore, statewide candidates must collect the written endorsement of at least two hundred state delegates in order to be eligible for the state GOP's endorsement and must be voted on at an endorsement convention. Given these procedures, official endorsements from the California GOP occur only rarely–especially relative to organizations (like the California Republican Assembly) and other candidates, who both may issue endorsements much more freely.

Changes to the bylaws throughout the Tea Party movement's peak mostly stood to benefit larger counties and establishment Republicans within the state party framework. In 2010's bylaws, for example, populous counties gained appointed delegates to the state central committee by a change that granted one bonus delegate appointment per 75,000 registered Republicans in the county. Furthermore, the number of appointed delegates to the committee by Republican nominees who outperformed Republican voter registration doubled, which would likely result in more moderate Republican committee members being appointed to the state central committee than extreme ones. In that same year's bylaws, a requirement was added that Republican nominees for any statewide or federal office must be registered Republicans for at least one year. Finally, quorums for nominating conventions were established in 2012. In prior years no quorum minimum was required, which would benefit small, but energized, grassroots members in the party.

Finally, the chair of the state party has taken on a more pronounced role over the past fifteen years. In 2012, the chair absorbed the role of the now-defunct Operations Committee and the Chief Operating Officer of the party now serves directly under the chair. As of 2015, the state central committee meets no less than once a year (down from twice), which gives the chair more authority when running the day-to-day operations of the party. In 2018, the chair election became a separate ballot from the other officers and the chair was allowed to run for an additional term.

Intraparty Conflicts in the California Republican Party

Pete Wilson versus social conservatives in the 1990s

Within the party, rank-and-file Republicans were more frequent than socially conservative activists, but the activists tended to dominate state conventions.[23] In the late 1980s, the socially conservative wing fought to prohibit Log Cabin Republicans and gay members from the party, although the conflicts never amounted to changes in the party platform.[24] The two

[23] Peterson, Larry. "GOP convention blocks Dannemeyer resolution." *The Orange County Register*, September 11, 1989: B01.

[24] E.g. Carson and Susan Jetton, Daniel C. "GOP recruits minorities in try at majority status." *San Diego Union, The (CA)*, September 9, 1985: A-6.

chairs serving during this period– Bob Naylor (1987-1989)[25] and Frank Visco (1989-1991)– opposed the efforts of those trying to shift the party to the right. At 1989's convention, for example, Visco adjourned a meeting of social conservatives by claiming it lacked a quorum, denied two procedural votes meant to advance anti-gay agenda items, and made appointments immediately before the convention to stack the resolutions committee against the socially conservative wing.[26]

Regardless of faction, the California GOP struggled to field candidates in statewide elections in the late 1980s.[27] Recognizing the imminent redrawing of federal and state legislative districts, the state GOP's strategy involved steadfast support behind a candidate at the top of the ballot in the 1990 election cycle and hoping that it could lead to favorable conditions in down-ballot races.[28] U.S. Senator Pete Wilson was chosen for this role: when he resigned from the Senate to launch his gubernatorial campaign, the party endeavored to clear the field of any other primary candidates.[29]

Wilson's status as a pro-choice moderate Republican increased tensions within the state party, although establishment Republican leaders continued to successfully parry the socially conservative faction. At the 1990 convention, for example, Wilson supporters helped to delay a resolution on the party's abortion stance until 1991.[30] Furthermore, a compromise was reached with social conservatives that banned new gay Republican clubs while allowing existing ones (like the Log Cabin Republicans).[31] Wilson's victorious election as governor brought no alleviation of intraparty conflict, as nearly every conservative Republican (not just social conservatives) mounted opposition to Wilson's predilection to work with the Democratic majority in the state legislature.[32]

Social conservatives gained enough county leadership positions in 1990 to begin seizing state party influence over the next year.[33] Anti-abortion and anti-gay rights leader William Dannemeyer mounted a primary challenge to Wilson's appointed replacement, establishment Republican U.S. Senator John Seymour, although Dannemeyer lost decisively.[34] Aside from Seymour's primary, however, Wilson was much less successful with his hand-chosen candidates for office against more conservatives candidates.[35] Finally, the Wilson-aligned party chair Frank

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[25] Peterson, Larry. "Republicans elect Naylor over Park as chairman - Effort led by Sen. Wilson defeats grass-roots activists' revolt." *The Orange County Register*, February 23, 1987: b06.

[26] Peterson, Larry. "GOP convention blocks Dannemeyer resolution." *The Orange County Register*, September 11, 1989: B01.

[27] E.g. "California Republicans need another Ronald Reagan." *Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)*, May 31, 1987: A10.

[28] Sweeney, James W. "GOP Strives for Unity Amid Factional Splits at Convention." *Daily News of Los Angeles (CA)*, March 12, 1990: N6.

[29] Sweeney, James W. "Wilson Needles Democrats at State GOP Convention." *Daily News of Los Angeles (CA)*, September 10, 1989: N1.

[30] "GOP puts forth united front at state meeting." *Evening Tribune (San Diego, CA)*, March 12, 1990: A-3.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Sweeney, James W. "Wilson Faces Pitfalls on Road to Center." *Daily News of Los Angeles (CA)*, February 18, 1991: N1.

[33] Chance, Amy. "State GOP Braces for Ideological Split at Meeting" *Fresno Bee, The (CA)*, February 23, 1991: D11.

[34] Trounstine, Philip J. "Middle-class Voters Step Into State Spotlight: Incumbents Running Scared of Their Wrath." *San Jose Mercury News (CA)*, January 17, 1992: 1A.

[35] Gunnison, Robert B. "Conservatives Seek Control of State GOP: Many of their well-financed candidates won." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, December 21, 1992: A1.

Visco was succeeded by Jim Dignan, a member of the conservative California Republican Assembly and much more warmly regarded by conservatives.[36]

During Dignan's two-year stint as party chair, Dignan and Wilson became bitter rivals. In contrast to Visco, who utilized his influence as chair to stifle intraparty conflict in the name of unity, Dignan encouraged public disagreement on issues like abortion and gay rights.[37] Unsurprisingly, the state GOP's 1991 convention was more contentious than in previous years. Wilson was absent, and over two hundred socially conservative delegates staged a walkout when Seymour gave a speech on the convention floor.[38] The moderate wing of the party managed to stave off a resolution giving the state convention the ability to nominate their own slate of delegates to the RNC, but social conservatives gained a majority of seats on the party platform committee for 1992.[39]

Animosity between Dignan's and Wilson's camps came to a head in 1992 for two reasons. First, Dignan tried to curry favor with President George H.W. Bush by publicly proposing that the state GOP should endorse Bush before California's primary–without clearing the idea with the Bush campaign or Wilson,[40] who was Bush's campaign chair in the state.[41] The vote to endorse was shelved in favor of a non-binding straw poll when it became clear that the resolution to endorse Bush would fail.[42] Dignan's plan to circumvent Wilson and make his conservative wing more favorable to Bush and the national Republican party backfired.[43]

Second, the 1992 convention marked an escalation of the competing forces in the party. Seeking to present a face of Republican unity at the September 1992 convention, an agreement was struck between the Bush campaign, Wilson, and Dignan to downplay the convention and prevent intraparty squabbles from materializing so close to the general election.[44] Wilson skipped the convention again and encouraged delegates to do the same, with the intent to cancel the convention via failing to establish a quorum for party business.[45] Prior to the convention, Dignan had assured Wilson that he would not seek a quorum at the convention. The agreement was briefly successful: Dignan declared no quorum at the convention with several hundred delegates in attendance.[46] However, Digman reneged on the agreement soon after by convening a

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[36] Smith, Kathie. "Convention Could Test GOP Chief - Anti-Wilson Moves in Forecast With a Conservative at the Helm." *Modesto Bee, The (CA)*, September 13, 1991: 1.

[37] Braun, Gerry. "GOP conservatives vow hardball at convention." *San Diego Union, The (CA)*, September 13, 1991: A-3.

[38] DaRosa, Alison and Ray Huard. "GOP right wing clipped, Wilson backers crowing." *Evening Tribune (San Diego, CA)*, September 16, 1991: A-3.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Smith, Kathie. "Playing the Party Politics - Insiders Say Dignan Move May Be Loser." *Modesto Bee, The (CA)*, March 8, 1992: 1.

[41] Marelius, John. "Wilson is slipping nationally: Governor's political survival questioned." *San Diego Union-Tribune, The (CA)*, November 22, 1992: A-1.

[42] Braun, Gerry. "In state convention straw vote, Bush trounces Buchanan." *San Diego Union-Tribune, The (CA)*, March 2, 1992: A-5.

[43] Smith, Kathie. "Playing the Party Politics - Insiders Say Dignan Move May Be Loser." *Modesto Bee, The (CA)*, March 8, 1992: 1.

[44] Orlov, Rick. "Schism Widens in GOP: Conservative Issues Divide State Meeting." *Daily News of Los Angeles (CA)*, September 21, 1992: N4.

[45] Chance, Amy. "Governor, Right Wing at Odds." *Modesto Bee, The (CA)*, September 16, 1992: 4.

[46] Orlov, Rick. "Schism Widens in GOP: Conservative Issues Divide State Meeting." *Daily News of Los Angeles (CA)*, September 21, 1992: N4.

meeting of the smaller executive committee, who ultimately passed several agenda items that the conservative wing intended to pursue.[47] The largest victory claimed by social conservatives was the passage of an anti-abortion and anti-homosexuality party platform, the most conservative in the state party's history.[48]

The elections in 1992 were an abject failure for the California Republican Party: Bush badly lost reelection in the state, both U.S. Senate seats went to Democrats, and Democrats claimed a majority of new U.S. congressional district seats despite redistricting plans that were considered more amenable to Republicans.[49] With early polls indicating Wilson losing his reelection bid in 1994,[50] the Wilson administration recognized the need to reach a compromise with his intraparty rivals in order to once again achieve electoral success. A general agreement was put into place: Wilson and the moderates in the party promised to leave intact the anti-abortion and anti-gay rights planks of the party platform and to essentially cede control of the platform to the religious right until 1996.[51] In exchange, the religious right would stay united with the rest of the party through the 1994 election cycle.[52] For example, William Dannemeyer (the social conservative who ran a primary challenge against Seymour for U.S. Senate) urged the party to deprioritize the issue of abortion.[53]

During this critical juncture for the California GOP, moderates experienced successes in party leadership. Dignan's successor, Tirso del Junco, previously chaired the party from 1981 to 1982. Del Junco staunchly opposed abortion rights but nonetheless sought to build a big tent in the party, focusing on economic issues over social ones.[54] Next, the new vice chair, John Herrington, defeated the candidate backed by the religious right and the California Republican Assembly for the position.[55] Despite being a Reaganite conservative, Herrington was nonetheless more moderate than his opposition and desired to remove abortion as a defining issue for the state party.[56]

The moderate and religious right wings came together in a mutually beneficial relationship at a time when the religious right appeared to reach peak representation in the party. By the end of 1992, an estimated 38 out of 58 county-level Republican parties were controlled by religious right forces.[57] Nollinger (1993) attributes the success of the religious right at the local and county level to several features of the California GOP, including "nonexistent" precinct

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Schrader, Esther. "Divided State GOP Takes Tough Anti-Abortion Stand - Wilson Emerges as Big Loser in Bitter Fight Over Platform." *San Jose Mercury News (CA)*, September 21, 1992: 1A.

[49] Walters, Dan. "Wilson, GOP Take Huge Hit." *Sacramento Bee*, November 5, 1992: A3.

[50] Evans, Rowland and Robert Novak. "Abortion May Rip Apart California's GOP." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, February 16, 1993: A15.

[51] Trounstine, Philip J. "Wilson Steers GOP Back Into Line, Gets All His Wishes." *San Jose Mercury News (CA)*, March 1, 1993: 1A.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Smith, Dan. "State GOP `big tent' unrepaired - Party leaders buck strong opposition in pitch for unity." *Press-Enterprise, The (Riverside, CA)*, February 28, 1993: A01.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Lifsher, Marc. "Candidate's win at GOP convention a Wilson gain." *The Orange County Register*, March 1, 1993: a03.

[56] Roberts, Jerry. "GOP Deals Setback to Religious Right - State leader says abortion shouldn't be political issue." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, March 1, 1993: A1.

[57] Nollinger, Mark. "The New Crusaders--The Christian Right Storms California's Political Bastions." *California Journal, Jan* 1 (1993).

and ward organization.[58] At the state level, however, the religious right seemed content with control over the party platform– and did not pursue other avenues of influence like candidate recruitment or electioneering.

Conservatives, primarily members of the California Republican Assembly, were initially willing to be in lockstep with Wilson throughout Wilson's reelection campaign in 1994. After issuing full-throated support of Wilson in early 1993,[59] however, the CRA publicly called for Wilson to step aside that October.[60] Just two months before the 1994 primary elections, 31-year-old conservative political newcomer Ron Unz launched a primary challenge to Wilson and was endorsed by the CRA.[61] Unz received 34 percent of the primary vote– well short of a victory, but a powerful demonstration of the discontent harbored at Wilson by fellow Republicans during this period.

Wilson would go on to win reelection handily and Republicans won open races for Secretary of State, Treasurer, and Insurance Commissioner (while also capturing the State Assembly). In addition to a fundraising advantage over his Democratic opponent,[62] Wilson's victory was attributed in part to his linkages to the anti-immigration initiative Proposition 187, which passed easily.[63] Wilson's anti-immigration stance is speculated to have alienated Hispanic Americans from the California Republican Party in future elections.[64] Wilson's reelection was a Pyrrhic victory: as record numbers of Hispanic immigrants naturalized and became American citizens over the subsequent decades, they avoided the Republican Party so strongly that voter registration became lopsided in favor of Democrats.[65] As I note later, the modern California GOP leadership endeavors to avoid the clashes of immigration policy that occur in national American politics.

The California Republican Party became more conservative through the rest of the 1990s. After vice chair of the party John Herrington succeeded del Junco in 1995, the chairmanship was given to former president of the CRA Michael Schroeder (1997-1999),[66] then staunch anti-abortion conservative and CRA-supported John McGraw (1999-2001).[67] The protracted battle over anti-abortion stances within the party continued under McGraw's leadership. The divisiveness culminated in moderate Republicans hosting an alternate convention in protest of McGraw and the religious right. The religious right was blamed for poor election performances,

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Marelius, John. "For state GOP, uneasy truce holds." *San Diego Union-Tribune, The (CA)*, March 7, 1993: A-3.

[60] "Wilson Urged to Step Aside: Conservative GOP Group Says He'll Be a Liability in 1994." *San Jose Mercury News (CA)*, October 19, 1993: 3B.

[61] Endicott, William. "GOP Faction Endorses Obscure Foe of Wilson - Challenger: Governor 'Stands for Nothing'." *Sacramento Bee*, April 11, 1994: A4.

[62] Pasco, Jean O. "Wilson handily wins second term as governor - Brown's campaign was outspent, outmaneuvered and outvoted." *The Orange County Register*, November 9, 1994: e01.

[63] Novak, Robert D. "Prop. 187 Fervor Is Still Intense." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, December 6, 1994: A21.

[64] Roberts, Cokie and Steven V. Roberts. "Hard line on immigration hurts GOP." *Napa Valley Register (CA)*, November 17, 2005.

[65] Johnson, Kevin R. "Proposition 187 and its political aftermath: Lessons for US immigration politics after Trump." *UC Davis Law Review* 53 (2019). 2019.

[66] Jacobs, John. "(Another) Shift to the Right" *The Sacramento Bee*, February 20, 1997: B6.

[67] Chance, Amy. "GOP convention shows friction." *Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)*, March 1, 1999: A1.

stripping moderates of representation in the party, and placing the state party in significant debt.[68]

The redundancy of the Tea Party in the California GOP

There was very little change in ideological composition within the party since the 1990s: the central committee remained full of social and religious conservatives. Only one chair with moderate leanings was elected in the 2000s, due in large part to a political scandal that thwarted the presumptive, more conservative candidate.[69] Ron Nehring succeeded this moderate chair in 2007: Nehring held longtime alliances with Grover Norquist and Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform.[70] The state GOP continued to oppose moderate Republicans, none drawing more ire from party leaders than Arnold Schwarzenegger. Initially running in the 2003 special election for governor with the help of conservative party leadership, Schwarzenegger's embrace of moderate political positions and his concessions to Democrats by the end of his first gubernatorial term spurred animosity from virtually the entire state party.[71] At 2007's state party convention, Schwarzenegger warned that the party was "dying at the box office" and to embrace moderation, further angering party leaders.[72]

The California GOP fought against other moderates across the state. After a special legislative session approved a spending bill that raised taxes, state and county GOPs targeted the Republican legislators that voted for the bill in February and March of 2009.[73] One of the censured Republican legislators was moderate Abel Maldonado, who was pivotal in advocating for the top two primary now used in California.[74] Finally, the state GOP restricted the presidential primary to only Republican voters in 2008,[75] and later attempted to block decline-to-state (unaffiliated) voters for all statewide and legislative primary elections in 2010.[76] While the attempt to shut out unaffiliated voters wasn't successful, it revealed the extent to which state GOP leaders preferred candidates more sympathetic to conservative values in primary elections.

After a brief early tension, the California Republican Party was quick to embrace the Tea Party's messaging and fold it into the party. Chair Ron Nehring attended a Tea Party conference in April of 2009 and was booed by the audience for perceived flip-flopping on proposed tax

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[68] Marinucci, Carla. "State's Republican Party In Financial, Political Tatters Moderates blame divisive GOP chief." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, August 23, 1999: A1.

[69] Banducci, Elise. "California GOP official apologizes for remarks." *The Daily Emerald*. January 5, 2003.

[70] Kurtzman, Laura. "Conservatives at GOP convention ready to vent at Schwarzenegger, CA." *Associated Press News Service, The*, February 9, 2007.

[71] Quinn, Tony. "'Post-partisanship' Fails - Arnold's vision for remaking California's politics isn't working." *San Diego Union-Tribune, The (CA)*, October 7, 2007: G-1.

[72] Marinucci, Carla. "State GOP faces identity crisis at convention." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, September 9, 2007: A6.

[73] Halstead, Richard. "Marin Republicans clash over budget vote." *Marin Independent Journal (San Rafael, CA)*, March 10, 2009.

[74] Marinucci, Carla. "Cracks showing in state GOP." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, July 13, 2009: A1.

[75] Sifuentes, Edward. "Some voters temporarily switch parties." *North County Times (Escondido, CA)*, January 19, 2008.

[76] Marinucci, Carla. "State GOP may choose to close its primaries." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, August 22, 2009: C1.

hikes.[77] Later that month, however, the state GOP voted to oppose all tax increase propositions on the ballot that year– in defiance of Schwarzenegger, who endorsed and helped finance the measures.[78] From then onward, little friction was apparent between the two groups. The ideological overlap between the Tea Party and California Republicans was already high: the party apparatus contained several varieties of conservatives, including Minutemen and Ron Paul supporters,[79] who had already won seats in several county-level parties.[80] The 2010 state party convention hosted a Tea Party event to foster cooperation with Tea Party leaders.[81]

Despite the connections built between the party and Tea Party networks, it is highly unlikely that the Tea Party had any effect on California's elections in 2010. California's term limits severely restrict the number of incumbents that are eligible to run for reelection. Amongst the incumbents who were eligible, however, none from the state house lost their primaries, and no state senate incumbent even faced a primary opponent. Furthermore, the sheer advantages Democrats held in terms of registered voters and organizational capacity made it difficult for any Republican candidate (much less a Tea Party candidate) to win in a general election. Of the statewide elections, Republican candidates lost by margins comparable to Republicans running in other election years, and none ran on a platform specifically utilizing the Tea Party brand. Overall, the extent of the 2010 Tea Party movement was to procure a catch-all term for California conservatives to use while describing the ideology they had already been advocating for in the state.

In anticipation of the top-two primary, the California GOP fought over the ability to select and endorse candidates in primaries. Nehring (the outgoing chair) and other conservatives led the argument that it is a core function of the party to nominate and support candidates for office.[82] Elected Republicans, including U.S. House Representative Kevin McCarthy, state senate minority leader Bob Dutton, and minority house leader Connie Conway, counterargued that a small group of party elites would gain too much power in playing kingmaker on behalf of the entire party.[83] The 2011 state GOP convention ultimately approved an endorsement plan, considered a victory for grassroots conservatives.[84]

In contrast to other states with vibrant Tea Party movements, moderate Republicans began to counter the conservative state party in earnest. Donors like the moderate Republican Munger family supported efforts to moderate the state party's platform on abortion, gay rights,

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[77] Malkin, Michelle. "The Million Taxpayer March - A quarter-million people took time off work to rally and cry against reckless taxation and bipartisan spending." *Noozhawk (Santa Barbara, CA)*, April 19, 2009.
[78] Saunders, Debra J. "TEA parties target Repubs." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, April 21, 2009: A15.
[79] Yamamura, Kevin and Laura Mecoy. "Call to the GOP faithful - Schwarzenegger hits Angelides on taxes, immigration issues." *Sacramento Bee, The (CA)*, August 20, 2006: A3.
[80] Burress, Charles. "Tug-of-war for seats on GOP committee heading to court." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, October 26, 2008: B1.
[81] Marinucci, Carla and Joe Garofoli. "State GOP goes into convention 'on the offense'." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, March 12, 2010: C1.
[82] Marinucci, Carla and Joe Garofoli. "Clash over primary endorsements opens rift in party." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, March 15, 2011: A1.
[83] Van Oot, Torey. "Tensions flare at CRP meeting over Prop. 14 nominating rules." *Sacramento Bee, The: Blogs (CA)*, March 18, 2011.
[84] Chang, Jack. "GOP rules committee passes ambitious endorsement plan." *Sacramento Bee, The: Blogs (CA)*, March 20, 2011.

and other issues that may alienate the California electorate.[85] Other fundraisers worked independently of the party to recruit business-friendly legislative candidates, which sometimes included supporting Democrats in Democratic primaries.[86] One party delegate described being targeted by a "bounty hunt" program in which moderates contacted delegates and alternate delegates asking to serve as a proxy voter at the 2012 convention.[87] Finally, neither Mitt Romney's presidential campaign nor the Republican Governors Association agreed to share a portion of the funds they raised in the state with the California GOP.[88]

Succeeding Ron Nehring in 2011, blogger Tom Del Beccaro also had ties to the conservative wing in the state party.[89] Del Beccaro said that the first responsibility of Republicans was to make California job friendly again, not to win elections at all costs.[90] A combination of the rise in independent expenditures (through *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010)) and the unwillingness of donors to contribute to the party placed the state party in poor financial health.[91] Del Beccaro became a lame duck in the party several months before his term officially ended,[92] and influential members of the party recruited former state senate Republican leader Jim Brulte to run for chair.[93]

During this period, the extent of Tea Party influence was as a reactionary force within the state GOP. For instance, Tea Party Republicans in Marin County opposed the Marin County GOP's decision to support same-sex marriage in the county party's bylaws.[94] In other counties, disruptive Republican members were threatened with removal via changes to bylaws.[95] At the state level, the Tea Party wing was credited with pushing a resolution in support of a voter identification law (although the final resolution negotiated upon was mostly symbolic in function, lacking any enforceability).[96]

Given that the conservative wing of the party historically played a similar role as the Tea Party and overlapped significantly with the movement's ideology in 2009 and 2010, it appears that some members simply underwent a name change without meaningfully altering the composition of the party. Overall, two Republicans with overt Tea Party ties ran for a significant

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[85] Van Oot, Torey. "Big-spender Munger nudges state GOP toward center." *Sacramento Bee, The (CA)*, September 16, 2011: A1.

[86] Marinucci, Carla. "Business interests sidestep the GOP." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, June 25, 2012: A1.

[87] "Suppressing the military delegate vote at the CAGOP Convention." *Los Angeles Examiner (CA)*, February 18, 2012.

[88] Marinucci, Carla. "Cash-strapped California GOP lays off workers." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, July 27, 2012: A1.

[89] Marinucci, Carla. "Cracks showing in state GOP." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, July 13, 2009: A1.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Richman, Josh. "California GOP cash short, but insists candidates won't be." *Alameda Times-Star (CA)*, July 30, 2012.

[92] Van Oot, Torey. "California Republican Party approves structural changes." *Sacramento Bee, The: Blogs (CA)*, August 13, 2012.

[93] Siders, David and Torey Van Oot. "California Republicans look to Jim Brulte to lead comeback." *Sacramento Bee, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, December 6, 2012.

[94] Marinucci, Carla. "Marin County GOP breaks ranks - votes to support marriage equality." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, July 30, 2013: A1.

[95] Stapley, Garth. "GOP changes penalty rules - Local leaders target dissent." *Modesto Bee, The (CA)*, September 15, 2013: 1A.

[96] Siders, David. "Voter ID measure softened, embraced by California GOP." *Sacramento Bee, The: Blogs (CA)*, October 6, 2013.

position in the party or the state. In 2013, a Tea Party candidate ran against the more establishment candidate, Harmeet Dhillon, for vice chair of the state party,[97] although Dhillon was elected with support from Republican party leaders.[98] Second, Tim Donnelly ran for governor in 2014 with extreme rightwing views and Tea Party support;[99] however, Donnelly finished third in the top two primary with less than fifteen percent of the vote and failed to be placed on the general election ballot.

The California GOP's relationship with Donald Trump

Jim Brulte, Tom Del Beccaro's successor as state party chair, stood out for his successes in spite of Republican disadvantages in California. Despite a career as a conservative in the state senate in the 1990s, Brulte ran the state party as an establishment pragmatist. Under his tenure, Brulte focused on nonpartisan elections at the local level and to downplay polarizing national issues like abortion or immigration.[100] In addition to Republican gains in local, nonpartisan contests like city council seats, Brulte also helped the party fundraise to bring the party out of one million dollars of debt.[101] Brulte was instrumental in moving the state party convention in presidential years to be closer to the presidential primary, incentivizing presidential candidates, like Donald Trump, to attend.[102] Support from elected officials, national presidential campaign leaders, and state party leadership resulted in a bylaws change allowing Brulte to serve as chair for two more terms beyond the previous two-term limit.[103]

The 2016 Republican presidential primary was uneventful in California. Some California Republican leaders were initially neutral to Trump, including Brulte and U.S. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy.[104] Others, like conservatives Ron Nehring and Jon Fleischman, aided the grassroots network of Ted Cruz in California that, like in other state contests, promised Cruz a significant advantage by adeptly navigating the California GOP's primary system.[105] The Cruz supporters' strategy would never materialize, however: California's June primary election was held over a month after Ted Cruz and John Kasich suspended their campaigns and weeks after Trump was declared the presumptive nominee. Trump's California delegation included party leaders like McCarthy, vice chair of the party Harmeet Dhillon, and U.S. House Representatives

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[97] "GOP Activist Rodney Stanhope to run for State Party Vice Chair." *Los Angeles Examiner (CA)*, January 6, 2013.

[98] Garofoli, Joe. "S.F. GOP chief too left for state party's right." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, February 6, 2013: A1.

[99] Herdt, Timm. "Timm Herdt: Tea party under the bus?" *Alameda Times-Star (CA)*, March 12, 2014.

[100] McGreevy, Patrick. "GOP Sees a Way Back to Relevance in State: Departing from the Party Line can Pay Off, some Leaders Believe." *Los Angeles Times,* Mar 23, 2014.

[101] Cameron, Jim. "GOP's Brulte leads the uphill fight." *Capitol Weekly*. March 11, 2014.

[102] Horseman, Jeff. "Election 2016: California GOP chairman Jim Brulte looks to future." *The San Bernardino Sun*. April 28, 2016.

[103] Horseman, Jeff. "Praised for cutting Democrats' majority, Brulte may get third term as chairman." *The Press-Enterprise*. April 28, 2016; Luna, Taryn. "Brulte wins high-profile GOP support for re-election bid." *Sacramento Bee, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, December 16, 2016.

[104] Horseman, Jeff. "Is there a golden future for GOP? - Party chairman Jim Brulte aims to reverse electoral fortunes in state." *Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)*, April 29, 2016: 6; McPherson, Lindsey. "McCarthy: Some in GOP concerned Trump could become party's nominee." *Bakersfield Californian, The (CA)*, February 23, 2016.

[105] Siders, David and Christopher Cadelago. "Ted Cruz, John Kasich rally troops for a last stand in California." *Sacramento Bee, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, April 30, 2016.

Darrell Issa and Duncan Hunter.[106] The delegation also highlighted the influx of new members Trump brought into the state party: over two-thirds of the delegation were first-time convention attendees.[107] The California GOP's rules surrounding national delegates–Trump's campaign hand-picked almost the entire slate–created Trump's strongest base of support at the RNC.[108]

2017 would prove to be a transformative year for the party convention attendees. Since there were so few successes for California Republicans in 2016, the archconservative Fleischman said that the state party had no choice but to rally behind Trump as a figurehead.[109] New members to the party, energized by the Trump campaign, also contributed to the state party's acceptance of Trump. At the spring convention, the party approved resolutions in alignment with Trump and his national agenda: opposition to sanctuary cities, opposition to federal healthcare, and support of vetting citizens from Muslim countries.[110] In contrast to decades of contested floor debates throughout the party's history, however, these resolutions passed without struggle.[111] Later that year, the fall 2017 convention embraced Trump to an even greater extent: the slate of speakers included both mainstream and extremist Trump allies Steve Bannon, Tom Cotton, Joe Arpaio, Mike Cernovich, and Joy Villa.[112]

Trump's relationship with California Republicans above the rank-and-file members was more mixed. On one hand, several influential moderate Republicans protested the direction the Trump-aligned state party was heading in: Schwarzenegger advocated cutting off giving money to the Republican Party,[113] and Charles Munger Jr.-- who spent almost $92 million on Republican campaigns and other causes from 2005 to 2017–only spent around $90,000 in the 2018 cycle, and only toward moderate candidates.[114] On the other hand, a handful of party elites moved toward Trump in addition to convention-goers. For instance, while Brulte focused on local party-building as the party chair, vice chair Harmeet Dhillon became a leading conservative, pro-Trump voice in the state.[115] Even among staunch Trump supporters, there was a confusing disconnect between the president and his closest California allies. For example, Trump visited the state in 2018; however, none of Devin Nunes, Darrell Issa, Duncan Hunter,

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[106] Blood, Michael R. "Some big-name California Republicans among Trump delegates." *Associated Press State Wire: California (CA)*, May 10, 2016.
[107] Garofoli, Joe. "California GOP delegation to anti-Trumpers: never." *San Francisco Chronicle: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, July 18, 2016.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Murphy, Katy. "At California's GOP convention, delegates embracing Trump." *East Bay Times: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, February 24, 2017.
[110] Cadelago, Christopher. "California GOP moves to align with Donald Trump policies." *Sacramento Bee, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, February 26, 2017.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Christopher, Ben. "The Trumpification of the California Republican Party is well underway." *CALmatters (CA)*, October 23, 2017.
[113] Koseff, Alexei. "Arnold Schwarzenegger says Republican donors should 'starve' the party until it shapes up." *Sacramento Bee, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, March 21, 2018.
[114] Morain, Dan. "GOP's future, gerrymandering's power, prisoners' healthcare." *CALmatters (CA)*, February 22, 2019.
[115] Staggs, Brooke. "California's Trump delegates gear up for Republican National Convention." *Orange County Register, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, August 22, 2020.

Jim Brulte, or any other state Republican had been contacted by or communicated with Trump in advance of his visit.[116]

In the 2018 election cycle, no statewide Republican candidate broke 40 percent of the general election vote. Most of Republican attention focused on the gubernatorial primary. Democratic Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom was all but guaranteed a top two finish in the primary, and so two Republicans– John Cox and the more Trump-aligned Travis Allen–[117] competed for the last spot. Despite the party changing its bylaws to make it easier to issue endorsements, they still failed to do so.[118] Cox won among convention attendees over Allen with 55 percent of the vote, but failed to secure the requisite 60 percent necessary to earn the endorsement.[119] Cox ultimately placed second in the top-two primary with over 25 percent of the vote; Allen placed fourth with less than ten percent, barely above the third-most voted on Democratic candidate in the race.

The 2019 election to succeed Brulte as state party chair would be an open contest: the traditional successor, vice chair Dhillon, was appointed to a position with the RNC and did not seek the chairmanship.[120] Three candidates declared their campaigns for the chair position, including recent Republican gubernatorial primary candidate Travis Allen.[121] The lone moderate candidate dropped out weeks before the convention, citing the difficulty to unite the party while also blaming the other two candidates at the time for exacerbating the party's challenge to appeal to the wider California electorate.[122] Fearing a presumptive chair victory by Allen, Republican elected officials supported Jessica Patterson to launch a campaign for chair a month before the election.[123] Despite the two pro-Trump candidates urging their respective supporters to unite against Patterson,[124] they combined for only 46 percent of convention delegates and Patterson won the race outright with majority support.[125]

Patterson ran her chair campaign with a neutral attitude toward Trump and called for a continued focus on local races.[126] Patterson's tenure as chair, similar to Brulte's, is defined by

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[116] Gomez, Luis. "How California leaders are gearing up for Trump visit." *San Diego Union-Tribune, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, March 12, 2018.

[117] Horseman, Jeff. "Candidates claim Trump's mantle in area GOP debate - Two Republicans running for California governor tout their conservative pedigrees." *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin (Ontario, CA)*, January 5, 2018: 3.

[118] Garofoli, Joe. "California GOP, hurting in 'top-2' system, moves to back primary candidate." *San Francisco Chronicle: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, October 23, 2017.

[119] Plummer, Mary and Sandra Oshiro. "Here's what came out of the California GOP convention." *KPCC - 89.3 FM: Web Edition Articles (Pasadena, CA)*, May 7, 2018.

[120] Wisckol, Martin. "Congressional hopefuls talk pot." *Orange County Register, The (Santa Ana, CA)*, March 14, 2016.

[121] Horseman, Jeff. "These men want to lead California's Republican Party – what's left of it." *Orange County Register, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, November 30, 2018.

[122] Modesti, Kevin. "Departure shakes up contest for party chair - Hadley's decision to quit run could lift pro-Trump rivals, also open doors." *Daily Breeze (Torrance, CA)*, January 8, 2019: 1.

[123] "Can Newsom fix state tech? + Patterson runs for GOP Chair + Latino power." *Sacramento Bee, The: Blogs (CA)*, January 14, 2019.

[124] Garofoli, Joe. "State's GOP seeking road to relevance." *San Francisco Chronicle (CA)*, February 22, 2019: C1.

[125] Anderson, Bryan. "Democrats are 'the enemy': California GOP elects leader less focused on Trump." *Sacramento Bee, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, February 24, 2019.

[126] Christopher, Ben. "Critical choice for California GOP: Which door—if any—leads to revival?" *CALmatters (CA)*, February 21, 2019.

behind-the-scenes successes in fundraising, candidate recruitment, and voter registration while remaining pointedly ambivalent to the rightward shift of state and national party membership.[127] While the state GOP remains the minority party, successes under Patterson include re-claiming four U.S. congressional seats and one state assembly seat in 2020, as well as registering more voters as Republican than they do as decline-to-state (in 2018, the number of decline-to-state voters had eclipsed the number of Republican voters).[128]

In contrast to the party chair, the rest of the state party remained contentious between grassroots convention members (who tended toward Trump) and establishment Republicans, including many state Republican legislators. The Trump-supporting state senate Republican leader was ousted in favor of a moderate Republican in 2021;[129] the next year, the Republican candidates who won the party's nomination for state controller and attorney general waited to denounce Trump until after the convention convened;[130] and in 2023, changes to the bylaws meant to help Trump in the 2024 California Republican primary nonetheless prompted threats and protests by Trump grassroots supporters who asserted that Patterson and Kevin McCarthy were working against Trump.[131] Finally, the intraparty struggle over the party's platform continues; in 2023, the conservative wing of the party struck down a proposal to soften the party's stance on abortion and traditional marriage.[132]

Conclusion

The California Republican Party is an interesting inclusion as a case study in this dissertation and appears to match its initial classification— "High" in Christian Right intraparty conflict, "Low" in Tea Party and Trump-era conflict—fairly appropriately. Over the past few decades, the state party has been under constant intraparty conflict between those who prioritize ideological conservatism and those who seek to win elections. This trend peaked in the 1990s: the electoral success of moderate Governor Pete Wilson came at the cost of party takeover by staunch anti-abortion and anti-homosexual conservatives. Conservative control of the party by the time of the Tea Party movement continued this trend: ideological purity seemed more important to the state party than winning elections, and–perhaps as a result– the California GOP hit its low point in the 2010s. While there has been no stoppage of conflict between conservatives and the rest of the party, the past few election cycles seem to indicate that establishment leadership has gained a small advantage over grassroots conservatives in leadership elections. Overall, no other Republican state party pays a higher penalty from its ties

[127] Korte, Lara. "What's next for California Republicans after Trump?" *Sacramento Bee, The (CA)*, November 15, 2020: 12A.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Wiley, Hannah. "Pro-Trump California GOP leader ousted after losing two Senate seats in November election." *Sacramento Bee, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, January 20, 2021.
[130] Madrid, Mike. "Has a Republican reckoning arrived? Two GOP candidates in California may hold the answer." *Sacramento Bee, The (CA)*, July 27, 2022: 5C.
[131] "Tensions flare as California Republicans give Trump a boost by overhauling state primary rules." *Press Democrat, The (Santa Rosa, CA)*, July 29, 2023.
[132] Holden, Lindsey. "California Republicans reject gay marriage, abortion platform shift. Why inclusivity splits GOP." *Sacramento Bee, The: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, October 2, 2023.

to the national Republican brand than California's GOP due to the national party's stances on policy issues like immigration and abortion, considered extremely unpopular by California voters.

In this chapter, I argued that California's Elections Code and the California GOP's bylaws create a political system with a weak state party organization. Primary elections and the leadership committee structure benefit county- and district-level parties far more than the state GOP. However, the 2010s ushered in several bylaws changes that appear to keep any grassroots conservatives at arm's length, including greater committee representation for moderate candidates and changing the party's presidential primary to occur entirely at the state level (disincentivizing grassroots mobilization from within district parties). In spite of the disadvantages the California GOP faces– namely, an unfavorable electorate and an inextricable attachment to national party issues like immigration–the state party of late has managed to navigate its political climate about as well as it could by focusing on state-specific branding and local nonpartisan elections.

How do the three proposed hypotheses of this dissertation fare in the case of the California Republican Party? First, I find strong support for the state-level institutions hypothesis. A combination of few Republican elected officials serving in office, a divisive relationship with between them and the state party, and a progressive state government create a political environment that seems particularly vulnerable to intraparty conflict. Second, the decentralized nature of the California GOP's bylaws promotes opportunities for intraparty factions to take over at local and county levels, lending support for the state party hypothesis. This support is bolstered in the wake of bylaws changes in recent election cycles that sought to draw in party influence toward the center—the state party organization. Finally, California is a perfect candidate state to test the party competition hypothesis, and I indeed find support for it. A nearly monolithic Democratic government appears to spur intraparty conflict within the California GOP as multiple factions attempt to right the ship, even to this day.

As evidenced throughout this chapter, the state party walks on a knife's edge in terms of its relationship with the national Republican Party. On one hand, state party leadership has made several overtures to Donald Trump, the Trump-led RNC, and pro-Trump Republicans within the California GOP. Additionally, the exodus from the state party over the past few decades likely leaves it with a more extreme membership that is unrepresentative of the electorate. On the other hand, the state party fights to establish its own identity separate from the national party and avoids association with the RNC in statewide and down-ballot contests. The division between pragmatic, big tent leaders and more homogeneously conservative, Trump Republicanism rank-and-file members makes it difficult to describe the California Republican Party's relationship with its national party entirely in terms of nationalization and polarization.

While the state party is unable to be neatly classified into polarization- and nationalization-based explanations regarding its development, that is not to say that the future prospects of the party are dim. In fact, California Republicans may be optimistic about the next couple of elections for a couple of reasons. For one, it would appear that the nadir of the California GOP occurred in 2018 in terms of voter registration, meaning that the ceiling is quite high for the party whose floor cannot go much lower. Furthermore, the California electorate appears increasingly cynical toward the Democratic Party and its statewide leaders in recent years.[133] The relatively muted performance in California by Kamala Harris in the 2024

[133] Mitchell, Paul. "CA 120: Dems in a funk, but Harris and Newsom could still shine". *Capitol Weekly*. February 12, 2025.

presidential election (compared to Joe Biden in 2020), as well as Republicans gaining two seats in the State Assembly, suggests the possibility for the California GOP's prospects to improve in future contests.

Chapter 7: Michigan Republican Party

Introduction

The Michigan Republican Party is the chosen representative of only three state parties that were deemed "High" in intraparty conflict in the Christian Right and Trump eras, but "Low" during the Tea Party movement. Michigan's history as a competitive two-party state up and down the ballot for several decades makes it a particularly interesting case. Michigan Republicans are long associated with grassroots efforts to influence the state GOP, leading to periods of significant intraparty conflict throughout the Christian Right, Tea Party, and Trump eras. Evangelical supporters of Pat Robertson spent months prior to the 1988 Michigan precinct caucuses to elect slates of delegates favorable to them, culminating in a breakoff state convention in 1988 and extensive litigation from the George H.W. Bush campaign. The Tea Party movement shocked the existing state party structure from local precinct meetings to the state convention and leadership elections (although the electoral success of Tea Party candidates during this period was mixed). Conflict continued to escalate during the 2010s as several Tea Party leaders in the state party transitioned into ardent Donald Trump supporters, creating a paradoxical political environment where local grassroots leaders took over the party while focusing almost entirely on Trump and the national Republican agenda.

In this chapter, I argue that the Michigan Republican Party's institutional features grant significant power to neighborhood, local, and county levels of the party. Intraparty conflict stemming from these levels, therefore, lends support to the state party hypothesis posited in this dissertation. However, truly grassroots rank-and-file members of the party have been phased out as organized groups began to strategize around securing Republican delegates at the state convention and the RNC. In fact, the largest grassroots successes throughout Michigan's Republican parties are helmed by larger national forces like presidential campaigns. On the other hand, there are few state Republican parties across the country that have molded itself around the Trump-era Republican National Committee to the extent that the modern Michigan GOP does. Decisions made by Michigan Republican leaders over the past decade appear to solidify the state party's stance toward unilateral support of Trump regardless of local grassroots input, and in doing so lends support for the state-level institutions hypothesis—albeit through the absence of strong linkages between state-level political actors, not their presence.

The Michigan Republican party's defining feature for much of its history was a decentralized organizational structure that granted county-level parties greater influence than what is observed in other state parties. The role of the Michigan GOP's state convention is also unique for determining a majority of the state central committee's membership (the party's unicameral governing body), as well as the state party's officers. Therefore, the pathways to influence within the state party hinge on nominating and electing convention delegates at various levels of the Republican party in Michigan. While Republicans across Michigan had their own distinct brands of conservatism for most of the 20th century, coordinated groups began to target Michigan's decentralized system as an opportunity to pursue their own agendas, oftentimes with a national focus. As a result, the Michigan GOP–from its local chapters to its state leaders– has fallen increasingly in-step with national Republican trends like the Tea Party movement and pro-Trump Republicanism.

Background Information

Michigan			
Michigan Elections		Michigan Republican Party	
Primary type	Caucus (1988) Closed (1992-1996) Open (2000-)	**State party officer elections**	Elected by state convention
Presidential/state primaries	Separate events	**State party officer elections schedule**	Odd-numbered years
Presidential delegate allocation	Proportional with winner-take-all trigger (2020-2024)	**State party convention cycle**	Annual
State election cycle	Even-numbered, non-presidential years	**Pre-primary endorsements**	Yes - since 2022

Emblematic of other states in the Rust Belt region, Michigan experienced significant population growth for most of the 20th century before stagnating beginning in the 1970s and 1980s.[1] Michigan continues to rank among the slowest-growing states in the country in the 21st century.[2] In recent years, Michigan's rural counties experienced the greatest population loss, including nearly every county in Michigan's upper peninsula.[3] Racially, Michigan has one of the largest populations of White Americans in the country.[4] Due to Detroit's employment opportunities during the Great Migration, Michigan also has one of the largest populations of African Americans out of non-Southern states,[5] as well as one of the largest Muslim populations in the country.[6]

Michigan is the only state among all states included in this dissertation to not collect party affiliation with voter registration.[7] Therefore, determining historical and current trends in partisanship beyond interpreting the results of elections is difficult. Michigan state law requires election administrators to publicly release a list of voters with their choice of party ballot, but there is no method of distinguishing between registered party voters from unaffiliated ones.[8]

[1] U.S. Census Bureau.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Butler, Jaclyn. "Michigan Demographic Trends". Michigan Center for Data and Analytics. May 19, 2023.

[4] U.S. Census Bureau.

[5] Harrison, Alferdteen. *Black exodus: The great migration from the American south*. University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

[6] Abraham, Sameer Y. "Detroit's Arab-American Community". In *Arabs in the New World*. 1983.

[7] Michigan Department of State.

[8] Ibid.

Until Roosevelt's New Deal politics, Michigan almost exclusively elected Republicans into statewide and federal offices.[9] Since then, the state has seen intense two-party competition across all positions of elected office. Of particular note are Michigan's governors in the 20th century, many of whom remained popular within the state while becoming nationally renowned for championing their respective ideologies, from liberal Democratic governor G. Mennen Williams to conservative Republican governor John Engler. Michigan also produced two governors, George Romney and William Milliken, who were leaders among moderate Rockefeller Republicans.[10]

Historic political science research appears to come to different conclusions about Michigan's political system. Elazar (1966) and Sharkansky (1969) are bearish on Michigan, ranking it in the bottom five states for a perceived lack of political culture.[11] Mayhew (1986), assigned his lowest possible TPO score of 1 to Michigan for similar reasons, but at least identified unions as playing the role of party organizations and dedicated some lengthy discussion to their importance to Michigan state politics.[12] As the power of unions began to wane, it would appear that the parties took on the mantle of some organizational capacity: Gibson et al. (1983) rates both parties highly, although Michigan's Democratic Party falls in the top decile of all state parties nation-wide using their methodology.[13]

After Michigan's governorship and state house were led by Democrats for eight years in the 1980s, voters elected Republican governor John Engler in 1990. Engler would serve for three terms, during which Republicans would capture both chambers of the state legislature and elect Republican Spencer Abraham to a U.S. Senate seat. While Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm succeeded Engler and served for two terms, 2010 was another watershed year for Michigan Republicans: with the election of Republican Governor Rick Snyder, 2010 marked the first time Republicans held all four statewide elected offices since 1948. The state house also flipped twenty seats from Democratic to Republican control, and Republicans gained supermajority status in the state senate. Unified Republican governance of the state led to a redistricting plan that cemented Republican legislative control until the next redrawing a decade later.[14]

After voting for every Democratic presidential candidate since Clinton, Donald Trump narrowly won the state in 2016. The magnitude of the vote swing in favor of Trump– Barack Obama won the state by ten percentage points in 2012– elevated Michigan to prominent swing state status and was a primary case study for why Trump won the presidential election in 2016.[15] That said, state politics swung heavily in favor of Democrats throughout the rest of Trump's administration and Joe Biden's administration. Democratic candidates swept statewide positions

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[9] E.g. Homernik, Daniel. "Late to the Party: The Upper Peninsula in the 1932 and 1936 Elections." *Upper Country: A Journal of the Lake Superior Region* 1, no. 1 (2013): 4.

[10] "Republicans: Let George Do It". *Time Magazine*. May 19, 1967; Longstaff, Robert. "Milliken Gaining National Attention". *The Ann Arbor News*. January 16, 1971.

[11] Elazar, Daniel Judah. "American federalism: A view from the states." 1966; Sharkansky, Ira. "The utility of Elazar's political culture: A research note." *Polity* 2, no. 1 (1969): 66-83. 1969.

[12] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986.

[13] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.

[14] Benson, Jocelyn. "How Serpentine Districts Became Law: Michigan Redistricting in 2011." *Journal of Law in Society,* 13 (2011): 7.

[15] E.g. Markel, Bess. "Rural Despair and Decline: How Trump Won Michigan in 2016." *Journal of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics*: 156.

in 2018, defended them in 2022, and gained unified control of the state for the first time in almost forty years.

Election and primary laws

Michigan holds separate primary elections for the presidential primary and the state primary. Michigan considers their presidential primary closed, although this definition differs from closed primaries in other states since Michigan does not collect party affiliation in voter registration. Voters must opt into one political party's ballot in a presidential primary election. All voters in state primaries receive the same ballot, which contains candidates from both major political parties. However, primary voters are only allowed to vote for candidates of one political party: votes for candidates belonging to multiple parties on the same ballot are not counted. Michigan also provides an option for straight ticket voting at the top of general election ballots, one of only a few states that continue to do so.[16]

Michigan has many mechanisms of direct democracy, allowing citizen-led initiatives to amend the state constitution, to propose legislation, and to invoke legislative referenda. Ballot proposals span a variety of policy areas including elections and campaigns. For example, minimum qualifications for state legislators and judges were passed in the 1950s. More recently, a proposal in 1992 established term limits for state legislators. Other significant proposals changing Michigan's political system were passed in 2018 (redistricting) and 2022 (election transparency and reform).

In part because redistricting responsibilities were given to the state legislature, gerrymandering in Michigan is a recurring political debate. In 1992, the gridlocked state legislature caused redistricting plans to be drafted by a three-member commission appointed by the Michigan Supreme Court. Under unified Republican control, the 2001 and 2011 redistricting plans were passed. 2011's plan, in particular, generated attention for the perverse election results for Michigan's U.S. House delegation: despite Democrats receiving 240,000 more votes–more than five percentage points– than Republicans when aggregated across the state, Republican candidates nonetheless won 9 out of the 14 congressional districts.[17] A 2018 ballot proposal created an independent voting commission that included five non-partisan members. The plan, set to take effect in the 2022 election cycle, created more competitive districts and led to the Democrats taking control of both chambers of the state legislature for the first time since 1984.[18]

Two ballot proposals passed in 2022 with significant implications for Michigan's political landscape. Proposal 1 slightly relaxed term limits for Michigan's state legislators compared to the 1992 limits (twelve years of total state-level service), but required financial disclosure of all public officials. Proposal 2 enshrined many voters' rights into the state constitution, such as the early voting window and state-funded ballot drop boxes. The proposal also contained an assurance that voters may vote without an identification requirement. Recent unified Democratic government led to the passage of several bills meant to further improve

[16] National Conference of State Legislatures.

[17] Goedert, Nicholas. "Gerrymandering or geography? How Democrats won the popular vote but lost the Congress in 2012." *Research & Politics* 1, no. 1 (2014).

[18] McCartan, Cory, Christopher T. Kenny, Tyler Simko, Emma Ebowe, Michael Y. Zhao, and Kosuke Imai. "Redistricting Reforms Reduce Gerrymandering by Constraining Partisan Actors." *arXiv.* (2024).

Michigan's elections, like expanding Michigan's automatic voter registration system and banning AI generated content in campaign materials. Laws about election administration were also passed. For example, county clerks may no longer audit an election if they serve a political party in any capacity. Another law made it far easier to become an election inspector; the state senator sponsoring the bill argued that removing barriers would promote transparency and fairness on Election Day.[19]

Finally, Michigan's campaign finance laws are about average across the other forty-nine states in terms of transparency and disclosure.[20] Michigan prohibits corporate and union campaign contributions.[21] Michigan's campaign contributions for individuals, state parties, and PACs, on the other hand, are tiered by the political office sought.[22] While state parties and PACs may contribute equal amounts of money to candidates for the state senate or state house, state parties are given much higher spending limits in gubernatorial and other statewide campaigns. For example, the state party may spend $750,000 on the gubernatorial ticket with public funding, while PACs may only spend $83,250.[23]

Party rules and bylaws

Static features

Michigan Election Law provides guidelines for the timing and agendas of all parties' state and county conventions. Even convention delegates and the membership of political parties' central committees are delineated by the state of Michigan. Interestingly, political parties in Michigan must frequently submit documentation to the Michigan secretary of state (such as delegate lists and candidates to fill vacancies in office), but are not actually required to disclose their governing documents to the state.

The Michigan Republican Party is governed by one body at the state level, its central committee. Each of Michigan's 83 county parties is led by an executive committee equal to the number of government positions (including state legislative offices) the county decides by a partisan election. Congressional district parties are also led by their own committees, which are composed of 25 members and have the discretion to allow Republican elected officials to join as additional members. County and congressional district parties each adopt their own bylaws and procedures, which aids in creating a heavily decentralized power structure. Across all levels– local, county, congressional district, and state– the party holds conventions to select delegates and nominate Republicans for elected office.

The conventions of the Michigan GOP are numerous and important in determining the leadership of the party at each level. Delegates to the conventions are laid out by state election law. First, delegates are selected at precinct meetings to attend county conventions. Delegates are then elected at both the county and congressional district conventions to attend the state

[19] Press Release, State of Michigan. November 30, 2023.

[20] "The State Campaign Finance Index 2022". *Coalition for Integrity*. 2022.

[21] "State Limits on Contributions to Candidates". *National Conference of State Legislatures*. May 2023.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Michigan Department of State.

convention, which is composed of over 2,000 delegates. Bonus delegates are awarded to congressional district and county parties based on the locality's percentage of votes for the Republican candidate for president or Michigan Secretary of State. Furthermore, Republican elected officials and Republican nominees for elected office serve as at-large delegates to their respective party convention.

Over one hundred members serve on the state party's central committee, a vast majority of whom are elected at the party's spring convention in odd-numbered years. While seven members are nominated and elected from each congressional district, only one member is selected to represent the interest of the county-level parties. Any statewide Republican elected officials, as well as representatives from the state legislature, the U.S. House, and the U.S. Senate, are considered ex officio members and have no voting power in the committee.

The Michigan GOP has twelve officers. Eight officers are elected at the spring state convention: the chair and co-chair (running together), and six vice chairs representing different aspects of the party. A secretary and finance chair are selected by the central committee once it forms, and a treasurer and general counsel are appointed by the chair soon after. The chair of the state party leads all committee meetings, hires and appoints any party employees, and carries out any orders designated to them by the committee.

The Michigan GOP's rules render the state party resistant to rule changes and removal of members. Amendments to the party bylaws are considered by the committee and require a two-thirds vote with a quorum present (a majority of committee members). Removal of committee members and officers requires a three-fourths vote by the committee after a majority of members sign a petition beforehand to add it to the meeting agenda.

Dynamic features

Changes to the state Republican party's bylaws appear infrequent. Over the past few decades, only three complete and distinct versions of the Michigan GOP's bylaws were located: in 2012, 2020, and 2022. While searching for recent changes to bylaws yielded very little, the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library contains original copies of bylaws from the Michigan Republican Party until 1967. Surprisingly, a large amount of language from the 1967 version of the bylaws is carried over exactly into the party bylaws of recent years. Articles on the party's purpose, the responsibilities of its officers, committee meetings, and amendment procedures are nearly identical between 1967 and 2022. The scarcity of changes made to the party's governing documents over the span of decades could indicate the extent to which Michigan state law actively governs the state parties, requiring relatively little changes from the state parties themselves.

Even considering the few recent versions of the party's bylaws, very little changes were made each iteration. Up until the 1990s, the central committee was larger and composed of multiple representatives from each congressional district.[24] In 2020, a county party chairman was added to the regular membership of the state party committee. The procedure for removing party members made removal much easier: in 2012's bylaws, terminating a member from the committee was only possible if the member was guilty of a felony. The party removed formal procedures for removal in 2020's bylaws and beyond, making it an entirely discretionary

[24] Weissert, Carol S. "Michigan". In *State party profiles: a 50-state guide to development, organization, and resources*. (1997).

process– although removal must now be agreed upon by 75 percent of the committee's members. The requirements for quorum among standing committee meetings increased from two-fifths of members to a simple majority. Finally, 2022's bylaws are even more sparse, with the most significant change prohibiting party officers from endorsing candidates in a Republican primary or at a party convention.

Intraparty Conflicts in the Michigan Republican Party

Robertson supporters and the Christian Right within the Michigan GOP

Most of the 1980s were uneventful and unsuccessful for the Michigan GOP. Throughout this period, campaigns for the top elected positions stayed candidate-centered rather than run through the party.[25] Of note, incumbent lieutenant governor James Brickley was upset in the 1982 gubernatorial primary by a conservative outsider candidate, Dick Headlee.[26] Headlee lost badly in the general election, but was a significant conservative presence in Michigan throughout the 1980s and 1990s, leading a push to enact term limits and slash taxes in the state.[27] Emblematic for the Michigan GOP at the time, however, Headlee neither worked within the Republican Party framework nor was ever successfully elected to public office.

The 1988 GOP caucus convention divided Michigan Republicans into George H.W. Bush- and Pat Robertson-supporting factions, and represents an inflection point for the subsequent development of the Michigan GOP. The conflict began in August 1986, when the Virginia-based Freedom Council helped Robertson forces secure half of the delegates for the 1988 convention.[28] The next two years were marked by intraparty conflict and litigation over election rules and the naming of delegates.[29] At least 26 counties in Michigan held parallel GOP conventions, hosted by each faction, that sent separate slates of delegates to the state convention.[30] This culminated in two competing state GOP conventions in 1988: a court-sanctioned one in the convention hall and a "rump" convention with Robertson supporters (and Robertson himself) downstairs in the basement.[31] Bush ended up with a majority of Michigan's delegates, but his margin of victory clearly does not reflect the extent of disorder apparent in the Michigan GOP that persisted for multiple years.

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[25] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press, 1986.

[26] Hornbeck, Mark and Gary Heinlein. "He ran for governor, shook up state GOP - Ex-Farmington Hills insurance firm president and political firebrand died in Utah, 17 years after a heart transplant." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, November 10, 2004: 02A.

[27] Reed, Lawrence W. "Remembering a Giant: A Tribute to Richard Headlee." Mackinac Center For Public Policy. November 9, 2004.

[28] Penning, James M. "Pat Robertson and the GOP: 1988 and Beyond." *Sociology of Religion*. 1994.

[29] Dionne Jr., E.J. "Michigan G.O.P. Is Split on Eve of Vote." *The New York Times*. January 14, 1988.

[30] Hornbeck, M. and E. Petykiewicz. "Bush holds lead in bitter GOP battles". *Grand Rapids Press*. January 15, 1988.

[31] Penning, James M. "Pat Robertson and the GOP: 1988 and Beyond." *Sociology of Religion*. 1994.

Serious questions regarding the unity of Michigan's Republicans were raised in the aftermath of the 1988 convention. On the one hand, Robertson's campaign had politically mobilized evangelical Christians throughout the state. Most of the Christian Right organizations in Michigan cropped up after the 1988 election, including a state chapter of Robertson's Christian Coalition.[32] This emerging faction of the Michigan GOP made themselves known, pushing for party planks opposing sex education and gay rights in 1993: moderate Republicans had to pass a rule giving the state chairman direct control over the selection of the party platform committee in order to curb their advances.[33] On the other hand, the 1989 GOP convention was described as a "model of peace and harmony",[34] a stark contrast to the discord observed in the years prior. Whether or not the tranquil nature of the 1989 convention was due to the assimilation or the departure of Robertson forces is inconclusive.[35]

Candidate-centric politics were still the norm in the 1990s: Republican John Engler won the gubernatorial race in 1990 in a major upset over incumbent Democrat James Blanchard and essentially ran the Michigan Republican Party in the 1990s.[36] Specifically, Weissert (1997) notes that Engler "has been able to hold off potentially divisive elements of the party, such as the Christian Coalition".[37] For example, Christian Right presidential candidate Pat Buchanan won a surprising number of delegates in Michigan's 1996 primary due to the 15 percent vote threshold required to secure delegates. In response, Engler and the state GOP changed the primary rules for 2000 so that presidential candidates must win a majority of any congressional district's vote to win all of its delegates.[38]

Struggle for the party reignited after Engler's tenure as governor ended. The most auspicious change was the election of conservative Betsy DeVos as chair of the party in 1996 and again in 2003. Engler opposed a school voucher ballot initiative that the DeVos family championed, leading to the beginnings of fractures in leadership.[39] Engler's continuing antagonistic relationship with DeVos led to DeVos stepping away from the chair position in 2000.[40] An Engler ally, the more mainstream Rusty Hills, ran the party from 2000-2003 before stepping down;[41] DeVos, with the backing of newly-elected Republican statewide officeholders,[42] was elected chair again. DeVos was pushed to highlight the grassroots of the party, in contrast to Engler's top-down approach.[43]

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[32] Smidt, Corwin, and James Penning. "Michigan: Veering to the Right." *God at the Grass Roots: The Christian Right in the 1994 Elections* (1995): 147.

[33] Penning, James M. "Pat Robertson and the GOP: 1988 and Beyond." *Sociology of Religion*. 1994.

[34] Smidt, Corwin E., and James M. Penning. "A Party Divided? A Comparison of Robertson & Bush Delegates to the 1988 Michigan Republican State Convention." *Polity* 23, no. 1 (1990): 127-138.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Weissert, Carol S. "Michigan". In *State party profiles: a 50-state guide to development, organization, and resources*. (1997).

[37] Ibid.

[38] Weeks, George. "Who benefits from Buchanan pullout?" *Detroit News, The (MI)*, September 16, 1999: 15A.

[39] Hornbeck, Mark and Charlie Cain. "GOP rifts test state's leadership: Party splintering, Engler's lame duck status may hurt in fall." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, February 25, 2000: 1A.

[40] Weeks, George. "Abraham praises DeVos' work for GOP." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, March 16, 2000: 15A.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Harmon, Steven. "Yob bows out of state GOP race - Former party chief Betsy DeVos gets Yob's endorsement." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, November 15, 2002: D3.

[43] Ibid.

Little Tea Party success in Michigan

Saul Anuzis was elected chair of the Michigan GOP in 2005 after many candidates running to his right dropped out.[44] Anuzis had no direct ties to social conservatives or the archconservatives in the party and was endorsed by many establishment Republicans in office.[45] Anuzis stepped down to run for an RNC position in 2009, although the Republican losses sustained in the 2008 election– which saw Democratic victories up and down the ballot in Michigan– also put pressure to replace him as chair.[46] Ronald Weiser succeeded Anuzis with initial opposition from a more conservative candidate,[47] but ultimately won the chair vote uncontested.[48] Weiser was a longtime establishment Republican donor and fundraiser at the national level, and had previously served as a U.S. ambassador under George W. Bush.[49]

When the Tea Party movement began, Weiser and other Republican leaders in the state were quick to harness the energy that Tea Party members brought to their rallies.[50] It is clear that grassroots Tea Party groups in Michigan were not yet fully developed, however. At the top level, for example, Rick Snyder was the only candidate out of five that did not seek Tea Party support in the 2010 Republican gubernatorial primary.[51] Snyder ultimately won the primary as the most moderate candidate, in part due to his strategy of appealing to Democratic primary voters.[52] Down the ballot, Tea Party-backed candidates in three state senate races and two state house races won their primaries;[53] however, none of these races involved unseating an incumbent Republican. One national Tea Party group made endorsements in twenty Michigan state legislative races, but their leader expressed disappointment in the primary results.[54]

The Tea Party's greatest influence in Michigan's 2010 election cycle rested in U.S. House of Representatives races. Of particular note are investments made by national Tea Party groups (as opposed to those with local, grassroots origins). For example, Tea Party Express endorsed the Republican candidate in 12 of 15 races, four of which were newcomers who won their contests.[55] Of these, Dan Benishek and Justin Amash ran the most explicitly on a Tea Party

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[44] Weeks, George. "Money issue dominates GOP battle." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, December 12, 2004: 21A.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Channing, Charlotte. "Hoogendyk keeps going and going." *Kalamazoo Gazette (MI)*, November 14, 2008.

[47] Channing, Charlotte. "Hoogendyk works to 'unite' the GOP - against him." *Kalamazoo Gazette (MI)*, January 2, 2009.

[48] Hornbeck, Mark. "Hoogendyk out, Weiser in for Michigan GOP chair." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, January 28, 2009.

[49] Hornbeck, Mark. "Ann Arbor businessman poised to lead state Republicans." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, January 28, 2009.

[50] E.g. Luke, Peter. "'Tea party' puts us on road to ruin - Republican politicians raise barrier to proper care of infrastructure." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, April 18, 2009: A3.

[51] "Hoekstra joins House Tea Party Caucus." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, July 21, 2010: A16.

[52] Veselenak, David. "Candidates sharpen focus - A week before primary, GOP governor hopefuls appeal to party base." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, July 27, 2010: A11.

[53] Bouffard, Karen. "Tea party passes first test in state." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 4, 2010: A6.

[54] Ibid.

[55] "Previous Endorsements". Tea Party Express.

platform, and both defeated establishment Republicans in the primary election.[56] Benishek had never served in public office,[57] and Amash (who had previously only served a single term in the state house) became a founding member of the Liberty Caucus and, later, the House Freedom Caucus.[58]

Weiser declined to run for another term as chair and was succeeded by his endorsed choice, party finance chair Bobby Schostak, in 2011.[59] As Weiser did in 2009, Schostak had endorsements from establishment Republicans (including Governor Rick Snyder) and encountered opposition by conservatives.[60] National Tea Party leader Michele Bachmann also campaigned for Schostak in Michigan in December of 2010, dampening any efforts to mount opposition to Schostak.[61] Throughout 2011, party members estimated that one-tenth to one-third of the state central committee's 120 members were aligned with the Tea Party.[62] Schostak continued to embrace the role of the Tea Party movement, expressing appreciation that Tea Party members were gaining representation across all levels of the party.[63]

Michigan's 2012 election cycle was for the most part a continuation of the status quo for the GOP: Republicans gained a U.S. House seat and lost five state house seats. One Tea Party candidate won a U.S. House seat due to the incumbent abruptly dropping out of the race,[64] but there were no other Tea Party upsets in either primaries or general elections. Intraparty conflict, on the other hand, surged at the state conventions. Social conservative David Agema was elected as national committeeman in 2012 over Saul Anuzis, the former chair with establishment Republican credentials.[65] In 2013, Schostak barely survived reelection as chair (52-48 percent) to a Tea Party "enthusiast" in the state.[66] In the aftermath, the Tea Party lamented the chair election loss and urged members to become precinct delegates.[67] The defeated chair candidate stated that "you don't own the state convention until you own the precinct delegates that go to the state convention".[68]

Ten Tea Party candidates declared challenges to state legislative incumbents and three more ran for open seats in 2014; all three open seats were won by local Tea Party leaders.[69] The

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[56] Finley, Nolan. "Buckle up for thrill ride of a gov race." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 5, 2010: A1.

[57] Schultz, Marisa. "Mich.'s 5 new U.S. reps set to start." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, November 13, 2010: A7.

[58] "Amash helps found 'Freedom Caucus' to advocate conservative bills in House." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, February 2, 2015.

[59] Fleming, Leonard N. "Some question Dems' leadership." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, December 27, 2010: A3.

[60] Egan, Paul. "Endorsement rankles GOP right." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, November 23, 2010: A3.

[61] Cranson, Jeff. "Winning over tea party doubters - Michele Bachmann's support smooths way for would-be state GOP chairman." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, December 29, 2010: A1.

[62] Schultz, Marisa. "Tea party settling into the GOP." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, September 26, 2011: A8.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Williams, Corey. "Republican has early lead for McCotter's old seat." *Associated Press State Wire: Michigan (MI)*, November 7, 2012.

[65] "Anuzis loses key GOP post at Mich. convention." *Associated Press State Wire: Michigan (MI)*, May 19, 2012.

[66] Eggert, David. "Schostak re-elected as chairman of Michigan GOP." *Associated Press State Wire: Michigan (MI)*, February 23, 2013.

[67] "Tea Party activist speaks, maps out next move." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, November 14, 2013.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Heinlein, Gary. "Tea party moves to challenge incumbents - 10 Republicans now holding office to face opponents in primary." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, April 23, 2014: A4; "Rarely have would-be lawmakers inserted themselves into the political process prior to being elected. The go-along-to-get-along attitude for the most part has prevailed, until now." *Bay City Times, The (MI)*, October 2, 2014.

1st, 6th, 7th and 8th U.S. congressional house incumbents were also challenged by candidates running to their right,[70] although none of the incumbents running for reelection at any level of office were defeated. Establishment Republicans, in turn, challenged Justin Amash for the 3rd house seat, although Amash easily won his primary election.[71] Within the state GOP, however, Tea Party activists continued to fight for positions of power within the party. A week after the 2014 primary elections, a conservative faction installed Tea Party activist Matt Maddock to lead a congressional district meeting and forced through a slate of 121 delegates to send to the state convention later that month.[72] The symbolic target for the Tea Party was the lieutenant governorship, whose nominated candidate is elected by the state convention's delegates. While traditionally the convention honors the governor's choice of running mate, a Tea Party leader mounted a campaign against the establishment incumbent, Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley, in protest of Medicaid expansion signed into law by Governor Rick Snyder.[73]

Calley and other establishment Republicans launched their own precinct-level recruitment strategy to elect their own delegates to the 2014 county, district, and state conventions.[74] Ultimately, Calley was renominated, although the victory was nonetheless ominous for establishment Republicans: over one-third of the 2,100 convention delegates opted for the Tea Party challenger over Calley, an indication of the extent to which the Tea Party movement had inserted themselves into the party.[75] Additionally, the installation of Tea Party leader Maddock as a district convention leader was in violation of party rules and acknowledged as such by both county GOP leaders and Calley.[76] Yet, Calley (in the interest of unity) urged party leaders not to challenge the procedures that led to the slate of Tea Party delegates, and the takeover's leaders were neither replaced nor punished by the state party.[77]

The Michigan GOP's transformation into the party of Donald Trump

At the state GOP's February 2015 district conventions, two more districts ousted establishment Republicans and replaced them with Tea Party activists.[78] Days later, the state party convention elected Ronna Romney McDaniel as chair.[79] McDaniel had worked on the 2012

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[70] Hornstein, Dave. "Stage set for congressional delegation upheaval." *Detroit Examiner (MI)*, April 28, 2014.

[71] "US Rep. Amash wins 3rd District GOP primary." *Associated Press State Wire: Michigan (MI)*, August 6, 2014.

[72] Livengood, Chad. "Calley calls for unity in GOP - He tells backers not to challenge delegates backed by tea party." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 18, 2014: A5.

[73] "Nakagiri submits signatures to run against Calley." *Associated Press State Wire: Michigan (MI)*, May 5, 2014.

[74] Livengood, Chad. "GOP braces for tea party showdown - Conservative factions at Michigan convention seek to replace Calley on Snyder's ticket." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 20, 2014: A9.

[75] "In many respects it was an unfair fight. Poor Wes Nagakiri did not have the full force of the Republican establishment behind his effort to pull off the upset of the century. He wanted to propel Lt. Gov. Brian Calley into the history books as the first modern-day incumbent at the top of the ticket dumped by a virtual unknown." *Kalamazoo Gazette (MI)*, August 26, 2014.

[76] Livengood, Chad. "Oakland County tea party elects delegate to convention." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 15, 2014: A4.; Livengood, Chad. "Calley calls for unity in GOP - He tells backers not to challenge delegates backed by tea party." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 18, 2014: A5.

[77] Ibid.

[78] "Mitt Romney's niece picked to head Michigan Republican Party." *Associated Press News Service, The*, February 21, 2015.

[79] Ibid.

presidential campaign of her uncle, Mitt Romney, in Michigan and became a national delegate representing the state at the 2012 RNC.[80] After briefly considering a run for U.S. Senate in 2013,[81] McDaniel was elected as one of two national committee members to represent Michigan at the RNC in 2014.[82] McDaniel won the chair election with 55 percent of the vote, endorsed by party establishment and Tea Party leaders alike.[83]

Prior to Michigan's presidential primary, prominent establishment Republicans were heavily divided in support for candidates. Moderate Governor Rick Snyder did not endorse a candidate in the primary.[84] Former chair Saul Anuzis served as an advisor to Cruz;[85] another former chair, Ron Weiser, donated to Rubio,[86] but remained noncommittal when it came to publicly endorsing a candidate.[87] Attorney General Bill Schuette led Jeb Bush's campaign in the state.[88] Once holding a neutral stance in the race,[89] McDaniel became one of Trump's greatest allies in the state by supporting Trump before any other Michigan Republican leader once his nomination was secured.[90] Despite a publicly neutral stance for the primary, however, McDaniel was a featured speaker at a Trump rally in August of 2015, months before Michigan's primary election.[91]

Trump secured 25 delegates and won the state primary. Cruz and Kasich each won 17 delegates due to the way Michigan's Republican party awards their delegates: a combination of proportional allocation of delegates and at-large delegates selected by the state committee. McDaniel supported Trump immediately when it became apparent that Trump would be the Republican nominee, and worked to unite the fractured state GOP.[92] In one case, McDaniel cited a never-before-invoked bylaw that allowed the chair to remove an officer who declined to support Trump.[93] Outside of McDaniel, however, Republican elected officials were much slower to support Trump. Four of the nine Republican U.S. House Representatives from Michigan either

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[80] Oosting, Jonathan. "4 people hope to run state Republican Party." *Saginaw News (MI)*, January 7, 2015.

[81] Schultz, Marisa. "Romney's niece may run for Senate." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, March 13, 2013: A3.

[82] Oosting, Jonathan. "GOP selects new Michigan Republican National Committeewoman." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, February 17, 2014.

[83] Egan, Paul. "Ronna Romney McDaniel elected Michigan's GOP chair". *Detroit Free Press*. February 21, 2015.

[84] Livengood, Chad. "Gov knocks Trump's proposal." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, December 15, 2015: A1.

[85] "Cruz campaign taps former Michigan Republican Party chairman." *Associated Press State Wire: Michigan (MI)*, May 11, 2015.

[86] OpenSecrets.

[87] Livengood, Chad. "21 Elephants in the Room." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, April 10, 2015: A1.

[88] Burke, Melissa Nann. "Weekend conference to draw 6 candidates to Michigan." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, September 17, 2015: B1.

[89] Heinlein, Gary. "Hot ticket: Trump talk at Michigan GOP dinner - Presidential candidate has no organization in state and few donors, but tickets selling fast." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 3, 2015: A5.

[90] Lawler, Emily. "Doing the GOP shuffle." *Bay City Times, The (MI)*, May 9, 2016: A1.

[91] "Trump people -- not GOP -- prepare his local event." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, December 22, 2015.

[92] E.g. Kennett, John. "Romney McDaniel at Republican breakfast: GOP unity is possible." *Midland Daily News (MI)*, May 10, 2016.

[93] Eggert, David. "Michigan GOP ousts officer who publicly denounced Trump." *Associated Press State Wire: Michigan (MI)*, October 17, 2016.

refused to endorse Trump or outright opposed him.[94] Snyder never endorsed Trump, maintaining his preference to focus on Michigan state House elections.[95]

The Michigan GOP worked with the RNC to bring in campaign staff to help the Trump campaign on the ground in Michigan.[96] McDaniel reported seven state GOP staffers helping coordinate turnout while the RNC had 34 staffers deployed to Michigan for similar purposes.[97] The RNC's state director for Michigan in 2016 had also served in an RNC leadership role in Ohio in 2012.[98] Throughout the general election, McDaniel maintained a close working relationship with Reince Priebus, the RNC chair and close Trump ally.[99] Finally, McDaniel also defended Trump when Trump stated that he may not accept the results of the election, arguing that "they need to make sure there is no voter fraud first".[100] Combined with delivering the state to a Republican president for the first time since 1988, McDaniel's deference to Trump and the RNC led to Priebus advocating for her to succeed him as RNC chair.[101]

Longtime mainstream Republican Ron Weiser emerged to run again for state party chair after McDaniel left to pursue a position within the RNC in 2017.[102] After his first term as chair ended in 2011, Weiser had become a leader in the RNC's finance arm.[103] In May of 2016, Weiser was selected by the RNC to lead fundraising efforts for the Trump presidential campaign.[104] Weiser's competitor for the 2017 chair election directed Trump's campaign in Michigan,[105] and was considered more connected to the grassroots. Despite both candidates' ties to Trump, Weiser received endorsements from national Trump allies Reince Priebus and Steve Bannon;[106] the grassroots candidate withdrew shortly afterward and Weiser was elected chair as the only candidate in the race.[107]

The next two years were disastrous for the Michigan GOP, capped by a 2018 election cycle in which all statewide elected offices switched from Republican to Democratic control and each chamber of the state legislature lost five Republican seats. Three names emerged to succeed

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[94] Oosting, Jonathan. "Trump split grows in Mich. delegation - Upton joins Amash in saying he won't endorse presumptive GOP nominee for president." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, June 17, 2016: A1.

[95] Gibbons, Lauren. "Snyder: No regrets about sitting out presidential contest." *Bay City Times, The (MI)*, December 24, 2016: A3.

[96] Livengood, Chad. "Clinton's staff to dwarf Trump's in Michigan - Democrat to field 200 workers; Republican to tap dozens of RNC staffers, volunteers." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, July 7, 2016: A8.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] "State GOP chair may get national post - Trump considering Michigan's McDaniel to head Republican National Committee." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, November 15, 2016: A9.

[100] Livengood, Chad. "Mich. GOP leader defends Trump's results stance." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, October 21, 2016: A3.

[101] Beaumont, Thomas and David Eggert. "Trump praises Michigan GOP while weighing RNC chairman call." *Associated Press State Wire: Michigan (MI)*, December 9, 2016.

[102] Livengood, Chad. "Ex-GOP chief seeks top seat - Ron Weiser announced his chairman bid Friday, saying Lansing needs an 'A team'." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, December 17, 2016: A4.

[103] Fleming, Leonard N. "Ex-state boss gets national GOP job." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, April 5, 2011: A8.

[104] Oosting, Jonathan. "Clinton outraises rival Trump in Michigan - Republican's haul causing concern among party leaders." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, June 23, 2016: A3.

[105] Oosting, Jonathan. "Fundraiser may lead state GOP." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, January 21, 2017: A4.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Oosting, Jonathan. "Weiser set to take top Michigan GOP spot - Hagerstrom bows out after Trump officials back broker." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, January 23, 2017: A4.

Weiser (who declined to run again) as party chair in 2019.[108] State House Speaker Tom Leonard had the endorsement of several statewide Republican leaders, although he declined to run;[109] Gina Barr was a GOP activist who argued against "top down" party organization in favor of party building in the counties;[110] and Laura Cox, the eventual winner, was a former ICE agent endorsed by national Trump campaign manager Brad Parscale.[111]

Leadership of the Michigan Republican Party appeared to prioritize Trump's 2020 reelection campaign over the next two years. The party endorsed Trump in September of 2019.[112] Cox submitted only Donald Trump's name as a potential presidential candidate to the Secretary of State's office in Michigan.[113] The party also raised the minimum primary vote required for a candidate to be eligible to receive delegates, removing the possibility that other candidates in the race, like former Governor Bill Weld, could earn any delegates.[114] In 2020, Meshawn Maddock, a member of the Women for Trump Advisory Board from Michigan, declared the state GOP to be "Trump's party" first and foremost,[115] and the state GOP appeared to be folded into the RNC framework in August of 2020.[116] After Trump lost the state in the general election, the state House Speaker, party chair Cox, and others claimed "anomalies and irregularities".[117]

Ron Weiser emerged in the wake of the 2020 elections to run for yet another tenure as state GOP chair, and was endorsed by a majority of Republican state legislators and members of the U.S. House from Michigan.[118] Controversially, Weiser selected conservative Meshawn Maddock, who earlier referred to the party as belonging to Trump, to serve as co-chair of the state GOP.[119] Maddock, one of the state's leaders in election denialism, was called a "seditionist" who embraced "reckless conspiracy theories" by multiple state Republican leaders.[120] Weeks before the Michigan GOP's state convention, Maddock organized and sent a fleet of buses filled with protestors to Washington D.C. in what became the precursor to the January 6th attack on the

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[108] Gibbons, Lauren. "GOP chair candidate wins Trump backers." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, November 27, 2018: 001.
[109] LeBlanc, Beth. "Leonard won't seek state GOP chair; Trump campaign endorses Cox." *The Detroit News*. November 15, 2018.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Gibbons, Lauren. "GOP chair candidate wins Trump backers." *Grand Rapids Press, The (MI)*, November 27, 2018: 001.
[112] Barrett, Malachi. "GOP wants all-Trump ballot Party's primary list doesn't match secretary of state's." *Ann Arbor News (MI)*, November 21, 2019: 001.
[113] Mauger, Craig. "Michigan GOP: Trump is only worthy GOP candidate." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, November 13, 2019: B2.
[114] Barrett, Malachi. "GOP wants all-Trump ballot Party's primary list doesn't match secretary of state's." *Ann Arbor News (MI)*, November 21, 2019: 001.
[115] Mauger, Craig. "Republicans put faith in Trump in Oakland Co. - Supporters rally to reverse party's fortunes in key section of state." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 15, 2020: A5.
[116] LeBlanc, Beth. "Trump leans on state GOP leader - Cox faces unique circumstances, but is hopeful for Nov.." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 24, 2020: A5.
[117] Mauger, Craig. "Chatfield floats possibility of 'crisis' - On Fox News, House speaker referenced today's meeting on certifying votes." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, November 23, 2020: A6.
[118] Mauger, Craig. "GOP wants Miller to challenge Whitmer - Veteran official won't tip hand on 2022 race." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, December 30, 2020: A2.
[119] Mauger, Craig. "Mich. duo gains clout while pushing to overturn election - Some in GOP happy at promotion; others want repercussions." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, January 8, 2021: A11.
[120] Ibid.

U.S. Capitol.[121] Nevertheless, Weiser and Maddock defeated incumbent chair Laura Cox by a two-to-one margin.[122]

Intraparty skirmishes in the Michigan GOP peaked during this period. Republicans in public opposition to the false claims of election fraud were targeted by Trump loyalists. A majority of Michigan's county-level Republican parties promoted false claims about the election[123] and several sought to censure two Michigan U.S. House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump in January of 2021.[124] After the relevant state party committee voted against censuring the congressmen, the committee's chair claimed that his contact information had been leaked and was subjected to hundreds of calls and emails from Trump supporters.[125] Dozens of Trump supporters protested outside of the state GOP's headquarters after the party's executive director ascribed blame to Trump for Republican losses in the 2020 elections;[126] the executive director would resign his position in July of 2021.[127] Four-member county canvassing boards were also targeted by Republican Party leaders to replace existing Republican members of the boards with ones willing to deny the certification of election results.[128]

In August of 2021, the state central committee voted to hold an endorsement convention in April 2022.[129] Prior to this change, nominations were decided in August of election years which gave candidates only about two months to campaign before the general election. Even with the state party's decision to nominate candidates earlier, Trump had already issued endorsements for the statewide races months beforehand– Matt DePerno for attorney general and Kristina Karamo for secretary of state.[130] Co-chair Meshawn Maddock, in an unprecedented departure from tradition, also endorsed DePerno and Karamo a month before the endorsement convention would convene.[131] Some county Republican parties issued similar endorsements, which other GOP officials claimed was a violation of their own county party bylaws.[132] Finally, Trump himself visited Michigan in April with his endorsed candidates. They encouraged both current delegates and non-delegate Trump supporters to "storm" county conventions and

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[121] Egan, Paul. "Michigan Republicans choose U-M Regent Ron Weiser as party chair after bitter fight". *Detroit Free Press*. February 6, 2021.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Robinson, Samuel J. "'RINO hunt' on for Republicans who accept that Trump lost." *Ann Arbor News (MI)*, July 20, 2021: 001.

[124] Mauger, Craig and Melissa Nann Burke. "Censure efforts in state GOP persist - Anger over votes to impeach, next election split party focus." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, April 19, 2021: A1.

[125] Burke, Melissa Nann. "Effort to censure Upton, Meijer fails." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, April 29, 2021: A11.

[126] LeBlanc, Beth. "Mich. GOP members want party exec censured for Trump remarks." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, May 26, 2021: A6.

[127] Mauger, Craig. "GOP exec critical of Trump exits party post." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, July 15, 2021: A1.

[128] Mauger, Craig. "GOP pushes new slate of vote officials - '20 election critics among picks to replace Mich. incumbents." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, October 11, 2021: A1.

[129] Mauger, Craig. "Michigan GOP sets April convention date." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 17, 2021: A6.

[130] Lawler, Emily. "Trump's role in party a hot topic for GOP Betsy DeVos decries personality over principles during the Mackinac Republican Leadership Conference." *Ann Arbor News (MI)*, September 28, 2021: 001.

[131] Mauger, Craig. "State GOP co-chair endorses DePerno - Maddock seconds Trump's support of AG candidate." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, March 15, 2022: A5.

[132] E.g. Mauger, Craig. "GOP Macomb chair leads pro-Trump party battle - Forton's push to 'clean' house sowing division, opponents say." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, March 22, 2022: A2.

nominate preferred delegates to attend the state endorsement convention later that month.[133] It was speculated that Trump supporters were encouraged to attend to pressure delegates or even to flood the state endorsement convention with dubiously qualified delegates, creating administrative confusion.[134]

April's state endorsement convention lasted ten hours and resulted in endorsements for DePerno and Karamo.[135] The extent of Trump's takeover of the convention polarized Michigan Republicans. For example, Trump-endorsed candidates like Matt Maddock (who had led the Tea Party-fueled takeover of his district convention in 2014) recruited primary challengers to Republican state legislators: 18 out of 27 incumbents seeking reelection now faced challengers often running in support of Trump and election denialism.[136] In response, fundraising from more establishment Michigan Republicans moved away from the state party and toward individual candidates' campaigns, oftentimes the incumbents facing challengers recruited by Maddock.[137] The DeVos family, one of the wealthiest donors to Republican causes, were contributors to this more mainstream Republican fundraising effort.[138] The loss of these previously-reliable sources of money would plunge the state GOP into financial problems for years.[139]

In the leadup to the 2022 state GOP convention in August, intraparty conflict cropped up in multiple county party conventions. In one case, the executive committee of the Hillsdale County Republican Party "disavowed" about 70 percent of duly elected precinct delegates, citing a county bylaw that "protects[s] the party from a hostile takeover of actors with intent to dilute or destroy the values of the party".[140] In Macomb County, two groups asserting themselves as the county's Republican party held parallel county conventions,[141] causing the state convention to spend two hours fighting over which slate of Macomb county delegates was legitimate.[142]

Tudor Dixon, the 2022 gubernatorial candidate, secured her nomination at the state convention. It became quickly apparent that the withdrawal of fundraising from more establishment Republicans left an insurmountable imbalance between the statewide Democratic candidates and their Trump-endorsed challengers.[143] In the gubernatorial race, for example,

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[133] LeBlanc, Beth. "Experts: Mich. GOP faces risks in Trump picks - Focus on '20 claims, hopefuls' experience cited as vote issues." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, April 4, 2022: A1.

[134] Mauger, Craig. "DePerno 'storm' call to test GOP - Pitch to converge on county meetings at odds with party rules." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, April 5, 2022: A1.

[135] Mullin, Andrew. "Local Midland party leaders react to GOP convention fiasco." *Midland Daily News (MI)*, April 27, 2022.

[136] Mauger, Craig. "Wave of primary challenges hits GOP - Incumbents under pressure triple in state Legislature." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, April 29, 2022: A11.

[137] Finley, Nolan. "Empire strikes back: Wealthy GOP donors move to avert Trump takeover." *Midland Daily News (MI)*, April 30, 2022.

[138] Ibid.

[139] E.g. Mauger, Craig. "GOP chair floats a primary overhaul - Karamo suggests a caucus, cites $460K debt for Mich. party." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, March 18, 2023: A1.

[140] LeBlanc, Beth and Riley Beggin. "Power struggles spawn chaos at GOP county conventions - In Hillsdale, Macomb, party deals with 'disavowed' delegates and dueling meetings." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, August 12, 2022: A1.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Mauger, Craig. "State GOP picks Hernandez for lieutenant governor at occasionally combative convention." *Midland Daily News (MI)*, August 28, 2022.

[143] Clark, Dave. "GOP elite are voting against MAGA candidates by withholding funds." *Midland Daily News (MI)*, August 30, 2022.

incumbent Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer spent over four times ($34.8 million) the amount Dixon spent ($8.2 million).[144] All statewide positions were easily won by the Democratic candidates, and Democrats also captured control of both chambers of the state legislature– the first time in nearly forty years.

State party chair Ron Weiser declined to run for chair again in 2023. All nine candidates interested in the chair position were Trump loyalists who blamed the rest of the party for 2022's election losses and denied the results of the 2020 presidential election.[145] The election featured DePerno and Karamo, the Trump-endorsed losers of their respective 2022 statewide races. Despite Trump endorsing DePerno for the chair election,[146] DePerno was considered more of an establishment candidate than Karamo (DePerno had closer ties to previous party leadership)[147] and Karamo won the chair election after three ballots at the state convention.[148] Karamo ran with a promise to give "precinct delegates control over the party" and to eliminate the "indoctrination" of public schools that led to a "GOP-phobic youth".[149]

Under Karamo, the party continued to face obstacles even as its leaders isolated themselves from the possibility of forming broader coalitions. Karamo reported $460,000 in party debt, but fired the party's budget chairman and denied access to anyone requesting financial records.[150] Michigan Republican leaders were endorsing Trump in violation of party bylaws,[151] and the state convention was filled with pro-Trump election deniers with open hostility to establishment Republicans.[152] Finally, the state GOP changed its primary system for 2024: a majority of Michigan's delegates sent to the RNC were now to be decided by caucuses held at each of the thirteen congressional district conventions instead of by an open primary.[153]

The party's continued financial difficulties and Karamo's erratic decision making led to calls for her to resign.[154] Karamo dissolved the party's conflict resolution committee (which was meant to handle internal disputes) in November of 2023.[155] In response, Michigan Republican

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[144] Michigan Campaign Finance Database. Michigan Department of State.

[145] Mauger, Craig. "GOP chair hopefuls back false voting claims - All 9 candidates to lead the state party question last 2 elections." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, January 17, 2023: A9.

[146] Mauger, Craig. "DePerno law license briefly suspended over fees - Prospect to lead state GOP now in 'good standing' before vote." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, February 18, 2023: A6.

[147] Mauger, Craig. "Divide looms in race to lead Michigan GOP - Several in party unsure any candidate can bridge delegate-donor disconnect." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, December 28, 2022: A11.

[148] Hermani, Jordyn. "Karamo's in the driver's seat, but not all are excited." *Saginaw News (MI)*, February 21, 2023: 001.

[149] Mauger, Craig. "Divide looms in race to lead Michigan GOP - Several in party unsure any candidate can bridge delegate-donor disconnect." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, December 28, 2022: A11.

[150] Mauger, Craig. "Ousted budget chair: Mich. GOP on path to ruin." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, June 30, 2023: A4.

[151] Mauger, Craig. "Oakland GOP chair's Trump support draws critics - Comments raise bipartisan eyebrows ahead of '24 primary." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, June 27, 2023: A10.

[152] Mauger, Craig. "Mich. GOP's new direction on full display at Mackinac." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, September 25, 2023: A5.

[153] LeBlanc, Beth. "RNC approves Mich. primary plan." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, September 25, 2023: A10.

[154] LeBlanc, Beth. "Most GOP district chairs call for Karamo to quit." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, December 30, 2023: A3.

[155] Mauger, Craig. "Michigan GOP feud escalates - Influential positions in the party taken from Karamo's critics." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, November 29, 2023: A1.

leaders followed the bylaws to remove Karamo as an officer in January of 2024:[156] a sufficient number of state central committee members requested a special meeting to consider Karamo's removal, although they needed to appoint over twenty proxy voters to establish a quorum.[157] Karamo rejected the move, creating a brief period where two state Republican parties existed and functioned,[158] and lawsuits were filed to determine who was legally running the party.[159] Eventually, the RNC ruled that the procedure to remove Karamo was legitimate.[160] The group that ousted Karamo elected former U.S. House Representative and Ambassador Pete Hoekstra as the new party chair, and Trump endorsed Hoekstra for the position.[161] Still, Hoekstra fought Karamo and her supporters for months for access to state party headquarters, financial records, and the party's website.[162]

Conclusion

The Michigan Republican Party's historical development is rife with turbulent intraparty struggles. In the buildup to Michigan's caucuses (the first primary contest to be held in 1988), Pat Robertson supporters undermined the Michigan GOP's entire hierarchy in an effort to push Robertson to victory. Christian evangelists supporting Robertson would remain active in the state party for several years afterward. The Tea Party movement in Michigan was more mixed: Tea Party candidates failed to win elections in 2010, but the Tea Party's national presence in subsequent election years helped to produce a strong contingent of sympathetic Michigan Republican leaders throughout the decade. Finally, the efforts of Michigan Republican leaders were pivotal in securing the state for Donald Trump. Yet, this victory appeared to come at the cost of the Michigan GOP's identity as it was refurbished into a vehicle for the RNC and Trump. My initial judgment of the Michigan GOP as having experienced "High" levels of intraparty conflict during the Christian Right and Trump eras, and "Low" levels during the Tea Party era, appears to remain correct.

In this chapter, I argued that the Michigan Republican Party's decentralized system has come under fire in recent decades by national forces seeking to gain influence through state and national Republican delegates. The avenues of opportunity for factions to invade the party are too numerous and coordinated for local rank-and-file members to overcome on their own. As

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[156] Schuster, Simon. "GOP chair wants to end primaries. Not so fast, officials say. Kristina Karamo's plan is for most candidates to be chosen in a closed caucus system." *Ann Arbor News (MI)*, January 10, 2024: 001.

[157] Schuster, Simon. "GOP faction elects leader after filing lawsuit: The group that says it is the state's true GOP picks former ambassador and congressman Pete Hoekstra as chair." *Ann Arbor News (MI)*, January 23, 2024: 001.

[158] Schuster, Simon. "Will the real Republican Party please stand up? The state party leadership schism doesn't seem to have an end in sight." *Ann Arbor News (MI)*, January 13, 2024: 001.

[159] Mauger, Craig. "Karamo's opponents sue, ask judge to intervene - Kent. Co. jurist asked to confirm removal as GOP chairwoman." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, January 20, 2024: A6.

[160] Schuster, Simon. "Lawyers: Karamo 'properly removed': The finding by attorneys with the Republican National Committee is only preliminary and doesn't carry any official weight." *Flint Journal, The (MI)*, January 26, 2024: 002.

[161] Mauger, Craig. "Trump endorses Hoekstra as Mich. GOP chairman." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, January 27, 2024: A11.

[162] E.g. Mauger, Craig. "Mich. GOP office was 'stripped ... bare' - Computers missing, Karamo backers 'zero' help, chair says." *Detroit News, The (MI)*, March 23, 2024: A10.

recently as 2022, national pro-Trump groups focused on state parties like Michigan's to promote election fraud through party-nominated candidates and delegates.[163] As the design of this system falls to the state party, I find strong and direct support for the state party hypothesis. Like several other state Republican parties featured in the dissertation, the national forces swooping down into local party meetings calls into question how "grassroots conservatism" should be defined and operationalized. Additionally, the case of the Michigan GOP supports the dissertation's state-level institutions hypothesis, though to the party's own detriment: frequent strained relationships between the state party, Michigan state government, and Republican elected officials (in particular, Rick Snyder) result in a party structure that seems vulnerable to even small-scale intraparty insurgencies. Finally, I find little support for the party competition hypothesis. Michigan has been a two-party state for the entire duration studied, yet the Michigan GOP nonetheless seems under fire from various party factions at almost every opportunity.

In reference to the ongoing discussion of each state party's relationship with polarization and nationalization, the Michigan GOP seemed to have struck a good balance between a working relationship with the RNC and to promote its own state candidates. Many state GOP leaders, from Governors George Romney and Governor John Engler to party chairs Ron Weiser and Saul Anuzis, aspired to influence national Republican politics while remaining committed to their individual causes and values. The rise of Donald Trump's presidency, however, appeared to shift the party towards a national focus. The decisions of state party leaders like Ronna McDaniel literally invited the RNC into the state party in 2016. The past few years have only solidified the retrofitting of the Michigan GOP into the RNC's image, and Michigan's Republicans appear to match the political ideology of the national Republican Party more than ever before. Michigan's Republicans ran the gamut of conservative beliefs throughout the 20th century; however, its leaders have increasingly polarized as any sort of moderate viewpoints (like those of Rockefeller Republicans) have been viciously attacked and removed from the state party apparatus.

The outlook of the Michigan Republican Party in future election cycles is mixed. On the one hand, the existing avenues for party participation–from precinct elections upwards– remain unchanged, so local members wanting to get involved are still capable of becoming a delegate and influencing the higher levels of the party. On the other hand, the national Republican Party has exerted significant influence in the state since the 2016 presidential election and will continue to do so as long as Trump represents the face of Republican politics. Given that the "grassroots" Republicans of Michigan are in lockstep with the RNC in terms of Trump support, room for competing factions or ideologies within the state party would appear extremely unlikely.

[163] Przybyla, Heidi. "'It's going to be an army': Tapes reveal GOP plan to contest elections". *Politico*, June 1st, 2022.

Chapter 8: Republican Party of Iowa

Introduction

The Republican Party of Iowa was selected after being initially classified as having a "High" level of intraparty conflict during the Christian Right and Tea Party eras and a "Low" level in the Trump era. Iowa's unique position as the first primary contest in presidential election years creates tight linkages between the two major state political parties and their respective national equivalents. Throughout the past few decades, the Republican Party of Iowa and the Republican National Committee experienced intraparty conflict nearly simultaneously. For example, evangelicals in Iowa played an outsized role in shaping the state party platform just as the RNC experienced similar factionalism at its national convention in 1992. Similarly, the rise– and gradual embrace– of Donald Trump in national Republican politics was echoed, beat-for-beat, in Iowa. On the other hand, the Tea Party movement never achieved liftoff in Iowa despite taking the national Republican Party by storm in 2010 and 2012. While a retrospective judgment of the Iowa GOP would reclassify its dealings with the Tea Party as "Low" in intraparty conflict, the party instead clashed heavily with supporters of presidential candidate Ron Paul in that same time period. In this chapter, I argue that the extent of intraparty conflict in the Republican Party of Iowa stems from external, national groups– particularly those promoting presidential candidates like Pat Robertson in 1988 and Ron Paul in 2012– who invest significantly in the state due to its "first in the nation" status in presidential primaries. Both of Iowa's major political parties value this distinction and seek to preserve their position, causing them to be increasingly more in lockstep with national political parties over time. All three hypotheses posited in this dissertation are supported in the case of Iowa, as I will show.

Since Jimmy Carter's 1976 victory in Iowa's caucus, Iowa has been catapulted into the national political spotlight for its position as the first state to allocate its presidential delegates each presidential election year. With less fanfare, though no less influential, the rest of Iowa's caucus system builds up from precinct caucuses (where the famous presidential vote is taken) by electing delegates to county conventions, then to congressional district conventions, and to the state convention, which finally elects delegates to the RNC. The allocation of resources for national political purposes underscores Iowa's bent towards national political party organizations. The state party's governing structure is also centralized around its relationship with the national Republican Party. The Republican Party of Iowa operates via a small, unicameral governing body composed of less than twenty members instead of a larger body of party members from across multiple levels of the party. The party chair is viewed as the chief executive officer of the state committee, although the influence of the position is often as a liaison to, and surrogate of, the national party.

Intraparty conflict in the Iowa GOP has yielded mixed results for its insurgent factions. For example, the influx of evangelicals into the party vis-à-vis Pat Robertson supporters appearing at the 1988 caucuses resulted in the religious right's control over the state party platform, although their electoral track record was dubious. The Tea Party, on the other hand, struggled to find a foothold in the state; instead, the presidential campaign of Ron Paul led to a contingent of his supporters taking control of party leadership positions in 2012. Yet, the Paul supporter takeover was unable to effect long term changes within the party, and establishment

Republicans were quick to re-seize control in 2014. Finally, the Iowa GOP came out in support of Donald Trump and ramped up efforts as the RNC and Trump became more closely linked. Changes to the Iowa Republican Party only appear to solidify the Trump faction's hold; for example, the decision to hold the Iowa caucuses in 2020 flooded all levels of the party nearly exclusively with pro-Trump Republicans. It would appear that national presidential candidates spur intraparty conflict in Iowa the most easily, as their influx of time and money into the Iowa caucuses may expedite new representation at higher levels of the state party.

Background Information

Iowa			
Iowa Elections		Republican Party of Iowa	
Primary type	Caucus	**State party officer elections**	Elected by central committee
Presidential/state primaries	Separate events	**State party officer elections schedule**	Odd-numbered years
Presidential delegate allocation	Proportional	**State party convention cycle**	Even-numbered years
State election cycle	Even-numbered, non-presidential years	**Pre-primary endorsements**	No - banned

Iowa's population of over 3 million residents makes it the smallest state covered in the dissertation. Across all states in the Midwest, Iowa falls in the middle in terms of growth rate: over the past two decades, Iowa has outpaced states like Michigan and Illinois, while simultaneously falling short of the population increases seen in Minnesota and North Dakota.[1] Iowa possesses one of the highest proportions of white Americans in the country, and the highest among Midwestern states.[2] Finally, Iowa's evangelical population is above average for the region– only Missouri has an appreciably higher proportion of evangelicals than the rest– although it is higher than the national average.[3]

Iowa's role as the "first in the nation" for the presidential primary process has helped foster an active electorate in the state. Voter registration in the state was historically competitive between the two major parties and unaffiliated voters. Republicans eclipsed Democrats in 2000, when active voters were 32.3 percent Republican, 31.2 Democrat, and 36.5 percent unaffiliated,[4] only to lose ground to Democratic registrations in 2010.[5] However, Iowa voters have swung heavily in favor of Republicans since: as of December 2024, the voter split is approximately 40-

[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "2020 PRRI Census of American Religion: County-Level Data on Religious Identity and Diversity". *Public Religion Research Institute*. July 8, 2021.

[4] Iowa Secretary of State.

[5] Ibid.

30-30 for Republicans, Democrats, and unaffiliated voters, respectively.[6] The stagnation and decline of unaffiliated voters in Iowa since the 21st century could be attributed to Iowa's closed primary system and the important role of the Iowa caucuses. However, the closed primary and the caucuses haven't changed substantially since Iowa gained its "first in the nation" status in the 1970s. Therefore, the decline in unaffiliated voters seems likely due to broader national forces (such as ideological polarization) encouraging further political participation.[7]

Throughout the 20th century, Iowa's statewide elected officials and both chambers of the state legislature leaned Republican, with only fleeting periods of Democratic control. Prior political science research explains these electoral results: Gibson et al. (1983) finds that the Iowa GOP enjoyed a substantial organizational advantage over their Democratic counterparts from 1975-1980.[8] Iowa's emergence on the national political scene with its caucuses occurred after the research timelines of Elazar (1966) and Mayhew (1986), perhaps owing to their apathy toward the state's political culture and extent of traditional party organizations.[9] Mayhew, for example, assigned Iowa a TPO score of 1 and had little to say about the state, only referring to the potential importance of the United Auto Workers on its political system in the 1950s and 1960s.[10]

The 2000s, in contrast to the 20th century, were the most favorable period to Democrats in Iowa's history. Tom Vilsack was elected in the open gubernatorial race in 1998, serving for two terms. In 2006, Democrat Chet Culver succeeded Vilsack as governor and Democrats gained control of both chambers of the state legislature and the congressional delegation. Democratic favor ended in 2010, when popular former Republican governor Terry Branstad ran for the seat again to defeat the incumbent Democrat Culver. While there were large Republican gains in Iowa in 2010, very few Republican candidates winning elections in the state had any affiliation to the Tea Party. Across the entire state, I find one Tea Party-supported candidate winning the Republican secretary of state primary, one Tea Party candidate winning an open state house seat, and one Tea Party candidate winning against a Republican incumbent in a state senate primary. The most influential linkage between Iowa Republicans and the national Tea Party movement is through U.S. House Representative Steve King, who became a founding member of the Tea Party Caucus in the House of Representatives. In subsequent elections, other allies of the Tea Party have emerged in the state– such as U.S. Representative Rod Blum and U.S. Senator Jodi Ernst– although their connections to the movement had little electoral ramifications.

Finally, Iowa is considered a national bellwether for presidential candidates seeking their party's primary nomination. Its caucuses, however, have drawn criticism for being unrepresentative of the rest of the nation. For example, Mike Huckabee's Iowa win in 2008 and Ron Paul's landslide victory in 2012 stand in stark contrast to their final delegate counts from the other contests. Iowa's preference for president in the general election similarly swings between election years. On one hand, Iowa voted in-line with the electoral college in choosing the

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[6] Ibid.

[7] E.g. Ahn, Chloe, and Diana C. Mutz. "The effects of polarized evaluations on political participation: Does hating the other side motivate voters?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (2023): 243-266.

[8] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.

[9] Elazar, Daniel Judah. "American federalism: A view from the states." 1966; Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986.

[10] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986

winning presidential candidate in 1980, 1992, 2008 and 2016. On the other hand, Iowa voted for eventual second place finishers Michael Dukakis in 1988 and Al Gore in 2000.

Election and primary laws

The parties' state central committee structures, delegate processes, and county central committees are defined by state law. The state central committees of the parties determine caucus dates, but election law vests the power of hosting the caucuses to the county level of the party. Delegates are elected at the caucuses to attend the county-level conventions, then elected at county conventions to attend congressional district conventions, and finally elect delegates there to send to the state convention. The state of Iowa also monitors its political parties more so than other states. For example, state party bylaws, constitutions, and a yearly audit by a CPA must be filed with the state. Some responsibilities enshrined in state law to the parties are also subject to inspection. County parties have the right to determine how many delegates each precinct is able to elect; however, Iowa county auditors are able to "fix" delegate counts in the event the county party fails to comply with proper state procedures.

In conjunction with their caucuses, Iowa also prides itself on conducting elections well. Iowa's lengthy election laws lay out detailed electoral procedures, which tend to result in fast, transparent, and efficient elections. That said, Republican Governor Terry Branstad signed a bill establishing a voter identification requirement in 2017.[11] Later, Republican Governor Kim Reynolds signed into law an election bill that restricted voting in many ways, such as reducing early voting windows, increasing identification requirements, and purging voter rolls more aggressively.[12] Iowa's campaign finance is also above average in terms of transparency and state control. Yet, there are no campaign contribution limits to candidates in Iowa elections aside from the prohibition of corporate contributions– making Iowa one of the least restricted states in terms of candidate fundraising capability.

Party rules and bylaws

Static features

The governing documents of the Republican Party of Iowa are sparse by comparison to other state Republican parties. One explanation for this is that the state of Iowa carries much of the burden of the electoral process, including setting up rules for its state parties. Another reason for shorter governing documents may be that Iowa only has one governing body; in contrast to other state parties in the study, the Republican Party of Iowa only has a state central committee. With no division of responsibilities between multiple committees (like an executive committee or board of directors), the Iowa Republican Party is centralized around its state central committee. Its individual members exert significant power since the committee itself is so small:

[11] Sanders, Linley. "Iowa Gov. Branstad signs abortion, voter ID bills into law." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, May 5, 2017.

[12] Boshart, Rod. "Iowa Republicans decry federal election 'power grab' - But Democrats say GOP wants to 'rig' the system." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, June 22, 2021.

it is composed of a set number of members from each of Iowa's congressional districts, plus the national committeeman and committeewoman. As of 2025, the state central committee has eighteen members.

The Iowa GOP's central committee is akin to a board of directors. The committee gains its strength from broad definitions found in the party's governing documents. The committee determines the "general management of the affairs" of the party, furnishes itself with officers and administrative staff, and adopts bylaws as it sees fit. The officers of the party–the chair, co-chair, treasurer, and secretary–are deferential to the central committee, including the chair (who is considered the chief executive officer of the party). The chair presides at all meetings, makes policy recommendations, approves expenditures, and controls party staff, although any appointive power is subject to the consent of the central committee.

Dynamic features

The Republican Party of Iowa's bylaws are updated irregularly. Records indicate twelve distinct versions of the bylaws in the 1980s, for example, but no bylaws updates from 2001 to 2012. Since 2012, the party bylaws have been updated at least once every two years. The party's constitution, on the other hand, appears to be unaltered since 1996. I have located eight distinct versions of the Iowa GOP's bylaws since 1996. While changes are sparse, the recurring theme across bylaws versions seeks to mitigate intraparty discord, often at the expense of a potential grassroots wing of the party. Iowa's national delegates to the Republican National Convention (RNC) have also been a frequent target of bylaws changes.

In 2012, a rule was added that strongly prohibited the state GOP from endorsing or supporting Republican candidates in contested primaries or caucuses. In 2015, the party bound their delegates to vote proportionally based on caucus vote totals. This rule was in direct response to Ron Paul supporters in Iowa during the 2012 election, who managed to capture 22 out of 28 delegates (despite Paul placing third in the caucus). In 2019, procedures to remove central committee members were added: a two-thirds vote of the central committee is required to send a recommendation of removal to the relevant district-level executive committee for a final vote. 2019's bylaws also removed a "legislative campaign committee" from existence. The removal of the committee, whose stated purpose was to win legislative elections, was perhaps the result of campaigns becoming increasingly candidate-centered and represents the shifting of electioneering efforts to outside the state party.

2022's bylaws added an appeals committee in order to consider disputes involving the state central committee. However, the committee itself is composed of one state committee member from each congressional district. Given that their only directive is to report a recommendation to the state central committee, the appeals committee seems like a symbolic concession to the sub-state levels of the party with no real ramifications. 2022's bylaws also tamped down on meeting involvement. All meetings of the central committee were previously open to the public; as of 2022, however, attendance is only open to registered Republicans or "invited guests". Additionally, all meetings would now include a closed session only open to state central committee members.

A final 2022 change added a slate of rules for Iowa's delegates to the Republican National Convention. Officer positions were created to control the delegation and enforce the rules. Delegates must be present on the convention floor and may not leave the floor as a form of protest, nor are they allowed to disparage Republican candidates for the nomination (either

publicly or to other delegates on the convention floor). Most significantly, however, all delegates to the national convention must now have previously served as a delegate (at any level of Iowa's Republican party) during the four years prior. Furthermore, all individuals running to be a delegate at the national convention must provide a letter of recommendation from a county-level officer or a district or state central committee member. All told, these changes clearly privilege existing party members and seek to suppress dissent from new grassroots members or those trying to influence the party from the outside.

From 2022 to 2023, an extensive code of conduct was added to the Iowa GOP's bylaws. Among thirteen rules, state central committee members and officers must: support Republican nominees; remain neutral in contested Republican primaries and caucuses; treat other members and staff with respect; and maintain confidentiality when asked or required by the party. Members may not publicly defame Republican elected officials, candidates, other committee members or the party as a whole, nor shall they engage in behavior that would reflect badly on the party. It is not immediately apparent why these rules came to pass: the most probable explanation for the rules passing comes from Governor Kim Reynolds, who endorsed multiple Republicans in contested state legislative primaries to punish incumbent Republicans who voted against her education bill.

Two final changes of note, made in 2023 and 2024, solidified party insiders' control of Iowa's RNC delegation. First, a national delegate nominating committee was formed in 2023 that nominates all at-large delegates (and their alternates) to the national convention. In 2024, 25 of Iowa's 40 delegates were at-large selections. Second, the only change in 2024 expanded national convention delegate eligibility to include current or previous Republican elected officials.

Intraparty Conflicts in the Republican Party of Iowa

Iowa's Christian Right: ideology over electoral success

The earliest indication of an evangelical Christian presence in the Iowa GOP was reported by the party chair at the time in 1984.[13] Two years later, evangelical Republicans were beginning to pack the state convention.[14] However, the 1988 Iowa caucuses represented the first breakthrough of evangelicals into the mainstream foray of Iowa Republican politics. It was at these caucuses that Pat Robertson placed second over George H.W. Bush– the result of a significant investment by evangelicals into the local, neighborhood levels of the Republican party.[15]

The territorial gains made by evangelical Republicans in 1988's caucuses almost immediately solidified into a durable, conservative wing of the Iowa GOP. When incumbent

[13] "Debate over religion is causing split in GOP - Christian right has big influence in at least 18 states." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, September 8, 1993: 4.
[14] Mayer, Jeremy D., and Bruce Nesmith. "Iowa: Everything Comes up Rosy." *God at the Grass Roots: The Christian Right in the 1994 Elections* (1995): 191.
[15] Trish, Barbara. "Iowa". In *State party profiles: a 50-state guide to development, organization, and resources*. (1997).

president George H.W. Bush sought reelection in 1992, establishment Iowa GOP leaders canceled their presidential straw poll to unite behind Bush and to prevent Bush's embarrassing caucus result in 1988 from happening again.[16] As a result, caucus attendance declined precipitously: GOP officials expected 20,000 participants in comparison to the estimated 108,000 that attended the caucuses in 1988.[17] However, this outward display of support for Bush came at a heavy cost: evangelical Republicans became the majority vote in many precincts and were able to approve their own party platform recommendations in addition to electing their own delegates to the county conventions.[18]

Ultimately, evangelical Christians at the 1992 state convention dominated state central committee elections. The state convention passed party planks supporting a total ban of abortion and opposing an Iowa Equal Rights Amendment.[19] At the 1992 Republican National Convention, Iowa's conservative delegation supported a floor debate on adding a pro-life plank to the national party platform, and the efforts of all evangelicals in attendance culminated in its passage.[20] Two years later, evangelical Republicans passed a state party platform advocating for schools to teach creationism, supporting public prayer, and condemning abortion in even harsher terms than in previous years.[21]

Evangelicals took advantage of low caucus attendance in 1992 to elect their delegates. In 1996, mainstream conservative Republican Governor Terry Branstad cited the number of pro-life presidential candidates as the reason for increased caucus attendance and sustained evangelical success.[22] Several presidential candidates won delegates in the Iowa caucus straw poll with almost 100,000 votes tallied. The largest victories for evangelical Republicans included a new state platform condemning abortion in a dozen places and a nearly unanimous pro-life delegation to the RNC that year, fighting to oppose GOP presidential nominee Bob Dole's attempts to soften the national party stance on abortion.[23]

Although evangelical party members and the central committee achieved many of their ideological goals throughout the 1990s, nominating and electing like-minded candidates appeared to be of secondary concern. For example, Branstad fought off a more moderate gubernatorial primary candidate in 1994 with the help of the Christian Coalition.[24] However, Branstad was not a member of the group, and his choice for lieutenant governor choice in both 1990 and 1994 was a socially liberal, pro-choice Republican.[25] The competitiveness of the 1994 gubernatorial primary–Branstad won 52 to 48 percent– reflects the turmoil within the Iowa state

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[16] Kirsch, John. "Top Iowa Republicans urge Bush to address voters' economic fears." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, February 28, 1992: 1.

[17] Kirsch, John. "Harkin, Bush 'locks' dampen interest." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, February 9, 1992: 13.

[18] Rogahn, Kurt. "With no straw poll, GOP groups concentrate on issues." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, February 11, 1992: 1.

[19] Kirsch, John. "Hard-liners rule in state GOP platform." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, June 14, 1992: 1.

[20] "Iowa delegates split on abortion plank." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, August 17, 1992: 1.

[21] "GOP draft platform leans right - Conservative forces focus on abortion, crime, school prayer." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, May 24, 1994: 4.

[22] Boshart, Rod. "Iowa Republicans unite behind staunchly conservative platform." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, June 16, 1996: 1.

[23] "Abortion issue." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, July 1, 1996.

[24] "Christian Coalition." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, April 27, 1994: 2.

[25] "Hectic Weekend Of Politicking For Republicans." *Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)*, June 12, 1998: A9.

GOP. Provided that evangelicals were in control of the state party,[26] the 1994 gubernatorial primary may represent a missed opportunity for a socially conservative Republican to enter the race and challenge the other two candidates on more conservative credentials.

A broader tactic employed by many establishment Iowa Republicans was to downplay or ignore their vitriolic party platform, which had the potential to be electorally harmful. Longtime Representative Jim Leach argued that abortion was a private issue and did not belong on the platform.[27] Senator Chuck Grassley declared that the platform, including its abortion plank, would not be a defining issue or swing the election one way or another.[28] State Senate Republican leader Jack Rife opined that passing a party platform may feel like winning a battle, but that it's important "to win the war" by electing Republican candidates.[29]

For their part, evangelical Iowans never appeared to threaten mainstream candidates with contested primaries in the early 1990s. The few instances of evangelical-backed primary challengers occurred in state legislative elections in 1998, and were unsuccessful.[30] Even in state party elections, Iowa Republicans routinely reelected their national committeeman and national committeewoman (despite opposition from more conservative candidates).[31] It would seem that the evangelical wing of the Iowa GOP was content with control of the ideological goals of the state party and showed little interest in matters outside of the state and national party platforms.

The Tea Party Movement and the Ron Paul Revolution in Iowa

Unlike the Tea Party movement in other states, Iowa's Tea Party network played more the role of a civic engagement group. A few primary candidates for House and statewide elections ran under the Tea Party label, but were unsuccessful in winning their respective primaries.[32] Significantly, none of the largest Tea Party groups officially endorsed candidates during the 2010 election cycle.[33] Instead, the groups hosted well-officiated debates and discussions with primary candidates.[34] These events highlighted only Republican candidates for office,[35] but leaders of Iowa's Tea Party groups were cagey about committing to only one political party.[36] In contrast to mobilizing behind specific candidates, Tea Party leaders simply encouraged their members (an estimated 10,000 in May of 2010) to engage in the political process with an emphasis on political open mindedness over partisanship.[37] Even after the 2010

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[26] E.g. Deupree, Mike. "Is GOP God's Own Party?" *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, June 23, 1994: 2.

[27] "Iowa delegates split on abortion plank." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, August 17, 1992: 1.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Boshart, Rod. "Iowa Republicans unite behind staunchly conservative platform." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, June 16, 1996: 1.

[30] E.g. "Officer from Brooklyn wins GOP contest." *The Gazette (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City)*, June 3, 1998: 10.

[31] "Blum Elected As GOP Delegate." *Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)*, June 16, 1996: A6.

[32] Lynch, James Q. "Tea Party, Christian Right candidates fare poorly in primary". *The Gazette*. June 9, 2010.

[33] E.g. Rivers, Christina. "Tea Party announces 3rd Congressional District debate." *Des Moines Examiner (IA)*, May 15, 2010.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Alison, Dale. "Iowa sees mixed tea party support." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, April 6, 2010: 1A.

[37] Boshart, Rod. "Tea Party promises surprises in primary." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, May 24, 2010: 1A.

elections, the Tea Party network in Iowa sought to recruit members from all political affiliations.[38]

In the aftermath of the 2010 election cycle, there were two repeated explanations for why the Tea Party movement never materialized as a force in Iowa– both of which invoke the state's status as the first contest of the primary season. An institutional explanation posits that the increased cohesion between national parties and individual presidential campaigns leaves little room for emergent groups (like Tea Party networks) to maneuver in the state, and for candidates to deviate from their major political party.[39] A mass public explanation argues that voters of Iowa feel sufficiently cared for by the national parties, leaving relatively few of them with the desire to reach beyond the existing party framework and toward Tea Party or 9/12 groups.[40] Iowa has one of the highest rates of voter turnout among all states,[41] and the relationship between political participation and political efficacy is positively correlated.[42]

The 2012 Iowa presidential caucuses ended up fracturing the state GOP more than it ever had been to that point. The "true" winner is still indeterminate, as the voting results from eight precincts were lost and many clerical errors were reported in other precincts.[43] Iowa GOP chair Matt Strawn called Mitt Romney the winner immediately after the caucuses, then backpedaled weeks later when Rick Santorum was determined to be the candidate with the most votes.[44] Strawn would step down as chair as a result of the poorly managed caucuses.[45]

Unexpectedly, supporters of Ron Paul (who earned the third-most votes in the Iowa caucus) were the chief beneficiaries of the entire caucus ordeal. Iowa was one of a few state Republican parties targeted by Paul's strategists due to its ease of participation and the way its delegates were elected and allocated.[46] Despite Paul's distant fifth place finish in the 2008 Iowa caucuses, it was apparently enough to demonstrate to Paul supporters that they could accrue disproportionately large victories relative to the size of their voter base four years later.[47] Historically, the Iowa GOP did not bind their delegates to a particular candidate, regardless of the caucus results. Both Romney and Santorum may have regarded Iowa as one of many primary contests, albeit the first. Ron Paul's network, on the other hand, prioritized potential delegates instead of static vote shares, which resulted in a drastic transformation of the state party from the precinct level up.[48]

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[38] Lynch, James Q. "Tea Party activists look past election." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, November 5, 2010: 6A.

[39] "5 things to know about the tea party movement." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, April 6, 2010: 2001.

[40] Alison, Dale. "Iowa sees mixed tea party support." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, April 6, 2010: 1A.

[41] United States Elections Project.

[42] Oser, Jennifer, Amit Grinson, Shelley Boulianne, and Eran Halperin. "How political efficacy relates to online and offline political participation: A multilevel meta-analysis." *Political Communication* 39, no. 5 (2022): 607-633.

[43] Pace, David. "Iowa GOP won't declare a winner of state caucuses." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, January 19, 2012.

[44] Pace, David. "Iowa GOP won't call caucus winner." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, January 20, 2012: 1A.

[45] Tibbetts, Ed. "Iowa GOP chief to step down." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, February 1, 2012: 6A.

[46] Bakst, Brian and Stephen Ohlemacher. "Don't tell Paul the primary is over." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, May 9, 2012: 1A.

[47] Beaumont, Thomas. "Paul camp gains influence at Iowa GOP conventions." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, April 23, 2012.

[48] Lynch, James Q. "Ron Paul backers bring tension to GOP convention." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, June 17, 2012: 2B.

Paul supporters quickly capitalized in the wake of the tumultuous caucuses. One of the leaders of Paul's Iowa campaign,[49] conservative A.J. Spiker, was elected to serve the rest of Strawn's term as state party chair.[50] In April's congressional district conventions, Paul supporters won a majority of slots on the state party's national delegate nominating committee to effectively gatekeep Iowa's delegation to the RNC.[51] Paul supporters also secured a majority vote of the state central committee.[52] Ultimately, 25 of Iowa's 28 delegates were Paul supporters despite his third place finish in the caucuses.[53] In response, the next version of the party bylaws would require delegates to be bound proportionally based on caucus vote shares.

Under new leadership, the Iowa GOP spent the rest of 2012 and 2013 alienating Republican elected officials and pursuing ideological goals. The state party platform passed in 2012 shifted significantly toward libertarian positions.[54] The conservative party chair, Spiker, launched a campaign to impeach a state Supreme Court justice who ruled in favor of same-sex marriage in 2009,[55] and publicly disagreed with the more moderate Governor Branstad on several issues.[56] Spiker also upset Republican candidates for his attempt to push back the date of the 2014 state convention by several weeks, which could have resulted in a more damaging primary and less time campaigning against their Democratic opposition.[57] Financial reports showed a steep decline in fundraising in 2012, which establishment Republicans attributed to a lack of confidence in the Paul-affiliated party leadership.[58]

By the middle of 2013, a few county Republican parties were calling for Spiker to resign.[59] In September, Spiker emailed Iowa Republicans affirming his pursuit of "traditional values" and a "pro-American" foreign policy and stating that he would not step down as chair.[60] In late October, Spiker and Senator Ted Cruz encouraged the party to move beyond a centrist message and to unite around economic growth and freedom.[61] Despite the outward confidence of

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[49] Beaumont, Thomas. "Paul backers seek state path to national impact." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, June 16, 2012.

[50] "Spiker elected new Iowa Republican chairman." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, February 11, 2012.

[51] Hall, Kevin. "Iowa GOP State Nominating Commission Loaded with Paul Supporters". *The Iowa Republican*. April 24, 2012.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Boshart, Rod. "Do political conventions still matter? - Critics call them 'infomercials;' supporters say they're still relevant." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, August 26, 2012: 1A.

[54] Lynch, James Q. "Ron Paul backers bring tension to GOP convention." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, June 17, 2012: 2B.

[55] Beaumont, Thomas. "Ron Paul's GOP legacy grows." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, January 16, 2013: 5A.

[56] "Iowa GOP chairman says he won't step down." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, September 27, 2013.

[57] Lucey, Catherine. "Iowa GOP at odds over 2014 Republican Convention." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, August 31, 2013.

[58] Jacobs, Jennifer. "Iowa Republican Party fundraising down in 2012." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, January 5, 2013: 7A.

[59] Lynch, James Q. "Linn County Republicans call for state party chair to resign." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, October 16, 2013: 8A.

[60] Boshart, Rod. "Iowa GOP chairman: 'I'm not going away'." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, September 28, 2013: 7A.

[61] Murphy, Erin. "Cruz, Spiker make pitch for Republican unity." *Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)*, October 27, 2013: 12.

Spiker (and the other Paul-affiliated party leaders), Spiker would resign as chair in March of 2014 to take an advisory position in Kentucky Senator Rand Paul's political action committee.[62]

If the 2012 caucuses demonstrated the power of Ron Paul's supporters to take over the Iowa GOP, the 2014 caucuses represented the pushback from the rest of the party. The establishment recognized the importance of the caucuses and were spurred into action. Governor Branstad and other Republican elected officials publicly encouraged all Republicans to participate in the caucuses.[63] Branstad's own reelection campaign, lower turnout in a midterm election year, and a crowded Republican primary for an open U.S. Senate seat (where none of the candidates were evangelical Christians or libertarians) all contributed to diluting the influence of the Ron Paul wing from the precincts up.[64]

The first portent of change occurred in the month before Spiker's resignation, when Christian conservative Danny Carroll was elected to replace the Paul-affiliated co-chair.[65] Carroll would be elected as interim chair to replace Spiker a month later.[66] In April of 2014, Paul supporters lost control of the state central committee.[67] Finally, the state party platform was reduced from 17,534 words to 2,027 in a series of sweeping changes that included a reduction of mentions of God and softening language on abortion.[68] Some Iowa Republican parties went even further by removing all mentions of marriage from their platforms, suggesting that control of the party had been wrested from the evangelical wing, in addition to the Paul supporters, at multiple levels.[69]

Another goal of Branstad's (and mainline Republicans') strategy to take back the party in 2014 involved encouraging establishment presidential candidates to campaign in the state.[70] Although establishment candidates fared poorly at the 2016 Iowa caucuses, the strategy nonetheless highlights the intrinsic linkage between Iowa's national spotlight and the state's political parties. Throughout the Iowa GOP's history, presidential campaigns like Pat Robertson's and Ron Paul's reverberated strongly within the state party, at least for a year or two. Branstad hoped that an establishment presidential candidate would increase mainline Republican participation at the caucuses, instead of being driven by the smaller evangelical or Ron Paul wings. As for the Tea Party, however, movements without a presidential candidate as its national figurehead appear unable to claim territory in Iowa that the two major political parties (and their presidential candidates of all different platforms) haven't already staked out.

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[62] "Iowa GOP chairman plans to step down." *Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)*, March 10, 2014: 6.

[63] Lucey, Catherine and Thomas Beaumont. "Extreme makeover: Iowa GOP edition?" *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, October 25, 2013: 2A.

[64] Lynch, James Q. "Off-year caucuses key to party-building." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, January 21, 2014: 2.

[65] "Former Iowa state Rep. Carroll voted GOP co-chair." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, February 3, 2014.

[66] "Carroll elected chairman of the Iowa GOP." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, March 30, 2014.

[67] "Mainstream Republicans again control Iowa GOP." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, April 27, 2014.

[68] Lynch, James Q. "Iowa GOP set to finalize platform - politics." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, June 12, 2014.

[69] Murphy, Erin. "Local GOP amends marriage stance." *Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)*, May 3, 2014: 1; "First District GOP tries to 'simplify' its marriage plank, then things get complicated." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, April 30, 2014.

[70] Lucey, Catherine. "GOP leaders hope Iowa shake-up draws candidates." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, August 8, 2014.

Iowa's 2016 Caucuses and movement toward Donald Trump

Mainline Republicans moved to further their hold on the state GOP by ousting the Christian conservative party chair Carroll just a few months into his interim term.[71] Jeff Kaufmann, a longtime ally to Governor Branstad, was chosen as chair by the newly-elected central committee members who also aligned with Branstad.[72] In contrast to periods of control by evangelicals or Ron Paul supporters, the Iowa GOP sought to appeal to as wide a base as possible. For example, Kaufmann condemned "purification tests" and openly welcomed all factions, including discontented Democrats, into the Republican party apparatus.[73] When a county party displayed Confederate flags at a parade, Kaufmann and Branstad expressed outrage and called for the immediate removal of the Republicans involved.[74] Finally, Kaufmann and the entire state central committee signed a pledge of neutrality for the upcoming Iowa straw poll and caucuses, a strong refutation of the Paul-affiliated leadership of previous years.[75] Later, a member of the committee resigned his position to endorse Ted Cruz out of deference to the neutrality pledge.[76]

The state central committee canceled the Ames Straw Poll to provide yet another incentive to attract establishment Republicans, who historically underperformed with the poll's respondents, to campaign in Iowa.[77] The 2015 Iowa State Fair Straw Poll was held instead, resulting in fourteen Republican candidates with at least one percent of the vote– a clear signal that the caucuses could be particularly contentious the next year.[78] Taking extra precautions to prevent the issues that undermined the 2012 caucuses, the Iowa GOP trained temporary caucus chairs on how to conduct the voting process, report results, and coordinate volunteers.[79] The 2016 caucuses shattered the previous attendance record with almost 187,000 participants, over fifty percent higher than the previous record set in 2012.[80] Delegates, now bound proportionally to the candidate's vote shares, went to nine different candidates– although Cruz (8), Trump (7) and Rubio (7) won the majority of the delegates.

What conclusions about the Republican Party of Iowa can be drawn from the presidential caucus results? First, entrance polls showed that 62 percent of Republican caucus attendees identified as born-again Christians (up from 57 percent in 2012), who were instrumental to

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[71] "Iowa GOP votes to replace party chairman." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, June 28, 2014.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Lynch, James Q. "It's time for action, new GOP chair telling party." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, August 25, 2014: 3.

[74] Boshart, Rod. "Republican chairman upset by Confederate flags - Organizers say flags on float represented Confederate soldiers buried in the county." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, July 6, 2015.

[75] "GOP party leaders to stay neutral in 2016 caucuses." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, December 3, 2014.

[76] Lynch, James Q. "Eastern Iowa GOP leader leaves post to endorse Cruz - Schulte: 'I believe it is time for all Iowans to step up and be counted'." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, November 29, 2015: 3.

[77] Lynch, James Q. "GOP calls off Iowa Straw Poll - 'We set the table, but the candidates didn't come to supper,' chairman says." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, June 13, 2015: 1.

[78] "Final Results from Secretary Paul Pate's State Fair Straw Polls". *Iowa Secretary of State*. August 24, 2015.

[79] Meyer, Elizabeth. "Des Moines County Republican Party holds caucus training." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, January 15, 2016: 001.

[80] Meyer, Elizabeth. "RPI chairman Jeff Kaufmann, Tom Greene address Burlington Tea Party." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, February 16, 2016: 001.

Cruz's victory in the state.[81] At the Iowa GOP congressional district conventions, almost all delegates elected were supporters of Cruz.[82] The national delegate nominating committee also came under control of the Cruz delegate base.[83] Finally, a majority of the nearly 1,600 delegates at May's state convention were Cruz supporters.[84] If the state party's balance of power tilted toward establishment Republicans in 2014, it would appear that the evangelical Christian wing surged back to the fore in 2016.

Despite the party's lean towards Cruz, the Iowa GOP came to terms with Trump months prior to Trump's official nomination at the RNC. Kaufmann acknowledged the surprise of Trump's success, but credited the grassroots of the party for working hard to achieve that result.[85] In a show of unity, the Iowa delegation pledged all thirty of their votes to Trump on the floor of their own state convention.[86] That said, outright support for Trump was absent: as late as January of 2017, Kaufmann's stated goals for the Iowa GOP avoided mentioning Trump by focusing instead on outreach to minorities and preparing for the 2018 midterm elections.[87]

Throughout the rest of 2017 and 2018, however, Iowa Republican leaders pivoted sharply in favor of Trump. In response to Nebraska Republican Senator Ben Sasse exploring a primary campaign against Trump for the 2020 election, Kaufmann harshly attacked Sasse for Sasse's supposed disloyalty to Trump.[88] Significantly, the evangelical wing of the Iowa GOP also appeared to shift toward Trump: one of its most prominent leaders, Republican national committeeman Steve Scheffler, proposed removing the neutrality pledge so that the state party can rally behind Trump.[89] In a far cry from when Ted Cruz won the 2016 Iowa caucuses, Kaufmann and the state central committee unanimously condemned Cruz for his involvement in blocking the nomination of an Iowan to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.[90] In a letter to Cruz, the committee accused Cruz of pursuing personal political victories and losing his good standing in a state, particularly among his "former supporters".[91]

The exact reason for the shift in tone among Iowa Republican leaders is unclear. One possibility is that their favoritism was borne out of Trump's appointment of Governor Terry

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[81] Hoffman, Donna R., and Christopher W. Larimer. "Iowa: The Religious Right as Sometime Republican Kingmaker." (2017): 49.

[82] Rosenthal, Eric. "Iowa GOP delegates for Trump - Guest Column." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, June 1, 2016: 5.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Boshart, Rod. "'Healing' Iowa Republicans turn to Trump - Resistance gives way at state convention to push for unity." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, May 23, 2016: 3.

[85] "Iowa Republican Party Chair speaks in Newton." *Newton Daily News, The (IA)*, June 15, 2016.

[86] Boshart, Rod. "Iowa GOP mends rift, seeks unity - Convention rallies behind Trump and against Clinton." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, May 22, 2016: 1.

[87] Murphy, Erin. "Iowa Republicans re-elect Kaufmann after successful elections." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, January 29, 2017: 7.

[88] Beaumont, Thomas. "Pence rallying GOP base in Iowa, where some cool to Trump." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, June 3, 2017; Sullivan, Adam. "This is our GOP, not Trump's." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, August 18, 2017: 6.

[89] Lynch, James Q. "Iowa GOP leader eyes caucus change favoring Trump - State Central Committee members wouldn't have to be neutral." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, November 3, 2017.

[90] Murphy, Erin. "Republicans send letter urging Cruz to halt his hold on Northey." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, February 19, 2018.

[91] Ibid.

Branstad as the U.S. Ambassador to China.[92] The promotion of Branstad, the de facto leader of the Iowa Republican party since 2014, may have softened criticism levied toward Trump by Republican elites and party leaders in the state. Another possibility points to the "grassroots" members of the party: Trump won the state over Hillary Clinton by nearly ten percentage points in 2016, polls indicate that Trump had been highly favored by Iowa Republicans throughout his term in office, and Kaufmann reported that 2017 was one of the party's best fundraising years ever in a non-presidential election year.[93] Pressure on the Iowa GOP to embrace Trump's presidency could therefore be attributed to both elite and rank-and-file pressure.

Since 1976, the Republican Party of Iowa had not held a presidential caucus in a year when the incumbent Republican president ran for reelection. In contrast, the 2020 caucuses were held in full-throated support of Trump (despite token primary opposition from candidates like Bill Weld).[94] The results of the presidential caucus were a formality: Trump received over 97 percent of the vote, securing 39 out of 40 delegates. Yet, the decision to hold the caucuses during such a year resulted in the most lopsided control of the Iowa GOP in its history by pro-Trump Republicans. After years of preparation, Trump launched a massive ground campaign in Iowa as part of a larger strategy to connect national Trump forces with state and local Republican parties.[95] Ostensibly meant to ensure Trump's renomination in 2020, the efforts gave Trump supporting Republicans a near-unanimous voice in its delegates and the state central committee.[96]

While the 2024 Iowa caucuses were much less attended than in 2016, Trump nonetheless decisively won the open contest with a majority of votes across six candidates. Kaufmann has remained the chair of the Iowa GOP since 2014. Kaufmann closely follows the preferences of the national Republican party in a pursuit to keep Iowa's first-in-the-nation status during presidential primaries. In response to the Iowa GOP's decision to hold the 2020 caucuses, Kaufmann acknowledged that the "audience for [the caucuses] is about 150 people in the RNC".[97] Therefore, Kaufmann has been one of Trump's biggest allies in Iowa since Trump's presidential victory in 2016, and the alliance has continued since.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed that intraparty conflict in the Iowa GOP is driven entirely by national, outsider groups like presidential campaigns. Coveting Iowa's "first in the nation" caucuses, organizations supporting candidates like Pat Robertson and Ron Paul invest heavily to take advantage of Iowa's caucus system and secure national delegates. However, the pairing of

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[92] Meyer, Elizabeth. "Branstad calls nomination 'extraordinary opportunity,' looks ahead to China." *Hawk Eye, The (Burlington, IA)*, December 8, 2016: 001.
[93] Boshart, Rod. "Iowa Republican leader worries about keeping new voters - Republicans in Washington must deliver on promises, Kaufmann says." *Gazette, The (Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, IA)*, July 26, 2017.
[94] Fisher, Benjamin. "Local Republicans also prepping for Iowa caucus." *Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)*, November 24, 2019: 12.
[95] Parker, Mario. "Trump Tests Re-Election Ground Game With Blitz on Iowa Caucus". Bloomberg. January 31, 2020.
[96] Colvin, Jill. "Democrats not alone in soliciting votes in Iowa; GOP is, too." *Associated Press State Wire: Iowa (IA)*, January 23, 2020.
[97] Ibid.

the presidential caucuses to the rest of Iowa's caucus system creates ample opportunity for delegates, newly elected with the goal of supporting a particular presidential candidate, to increase their representation at higher levels of the state party. In contrast, the Tea Party movement in Iowa– possessing neither outside investment nor a national figurehead in a non-presidential election year– never came close to shifting the balance of power in state Republican politics.

Two of the hypotheses introduced in this dissertation are supported in the case of Iowa and its Republican party. First, the tight working relationships between the parties, elected officials, and the state government—mostly revolving around the caucuses, but also election administration—help maintain a level of influence and transparency within the state GOP's central committee that would be difficult to upend by potential insurgent party factions. The design of the central committee, as well as the powers the party grants to the chair, are part of the party's bylaws and thus, the state party hypothesis is also supported. On the other hand, the case of the Iowa GOP refutes the party competition hypothesis entirely: when the state was contested by both parties in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, intraparty conflict within the Republican Party of Iowa peaked. Furthermore, the party competition hypothesis would expect intraparty conflict to occur in the past decade or so as Iowa becomes more solidly red. However, the state party remained united and little discord was observed, despite the party's transformation toward Trump in this period.

Owing to the close relationships between Iowa's state parties and the national Republican and Democratic parties, Iowa's GOP is almost by default the most nationalized political party in the country. Helplessly linked to national Republican candidates and their respective ideologies, the Republican Party of Iowa emulates the national Republican Party with every slight development or transformation. In particular, the takeover of the RNC by Trump Republicanism during Trump's first presidential term was echoed beat-for-beat by the Iowa GOP, culminating in the strategically-held 2020 caucuses that gave Trump nearly unanimous support in the state party. In a similar vein, Iowa's Republican elected officials and party leadership have polarized significantly as the national Republican Party has. Several Iowa Republicans are emblematic of the new conservatism of the Trump era, including Governor Kim Reynolds and Senator Joni Ernst. State party chair Jeff Kaufmann has also repositioned himself from a party-building pragmatist to one of the loudest supporters of Trump among state party leaders.

What does the future of the Iowa GOP portend? On one hand, it seems impossible for the state party to decouple itself from the national Republican Party as long as Iowa holds its coveted "first in the nation" primary contest. The RNC has all of the leverage in determining the order of primary contests, and both major state parties work diligently to secure their position by currying favor with their national parties. On the other hand, if Iowa were ever to lose its top billing, the incentive for presidential candidates to organize in the state would plummet to the point of not campaigning in the state at all. While harmful for Iowa's political importance nationally, it would at least provide an opportunity for the state parties to rebrand themselves more in-line with issues important to Iowa over national ones. In terms of the Iowa GOP's current structure (entirely in support of Trump), I would expect the emergence of future Republican presidential candidates after Trump to alter future iterations of the state party organization. The reliance of the state party on the RNC could quickly course-correct away from stalwart conservatism if the next Republican presidential candidate comes from an establishment or moderate background. Whether or not this is a likely scenario, however, is outside the scope of this discussion.

Chapter 9: North Carolina Republican Party

Introduction

The North Carolina Republican Party was classified at the outset for registering "High" in levels of intraparty conflict across all three eras of interest in the dissertation—one of ten such states in this category. That said, further exploration of the case of North Carolina revealed a more nuanced conclusion: a state party with delayed, but protracted intraparty conflicts as opposed to the fast, intense party takeovers described in other cases. Typical for Southern states, the North Carolina GOP only began winning elections against the dominant Democratic Party in the second half of the 20th century, and elections for the president and statewide offices remain competitive between the two parties. Overall, the North Carolina GOP's initial relationships with national Republican movements covered in the dissertation were underwhelming and took time to develop. After a surprisingly tepid response to the Christian Right movement (which failed to penetrate into state-level discourse), both the Tea Party and pro-Trump movements initially stalled in North Carolina and took years after 2010 and 2016 (respectively) to take hold in the state GOP.

In this chapter, I argue that the North Carolina GOP has increasingly sought to resemble the Republican National Committee over the past few election cycles, with particular respect to organizational structure, the integration of Tea Party Republicans and pro-Trump Republicans, and an emphasis on nationally focused ideology. Throughout the entire period of study, I find support for the state-level institutions hypothesis among North Carolina Republicans: a lack of state-level ties between the state party, state government, and elected officials may have contributed to the party's subsequent vulnerabilities to outsider, insurgent party factions. In contrast to other state parties with significant grassroots influence, the North Carolina Republican Party (whose rules create a strong executive committee and chair working in tandem) is defined by its willingness to adopt its platforms and rules from the national party downward, rendering my state party hypothesis less well-supported. The third hypothesis in the dissertation—the party competition hypothesis—is even less well-supported, especially since the emergence of Trump nearly a decade ago.

The North Carolina Republican Party and the Republican Party of Kentucky both had influential conservative U.S. Senators who served as party leaders for decades, but their relationships to the Republican party could not be more distinct. In contrast to Kentucky's Mitch McConnell, who invested heavily into party building, North Carolinian Jesse Helms demonstrated minimal interest in state party affairs. Instead, Helms spent decades in office dedicating himself almost entirely to the pursuit of ideological goals on a national level. Therefore, despite Helms' close ties to national leaders of the religious right, evangelicals never wielded significant influence in the North Carolina GOP.

Similarly, the original Tea Party movement was largely ineffectual in the state. The few Tea Party networks in the state at the time were limited to general advocacy of ideological positions and very few candidates ran under a Tea Party banner– the movement was squarely outside of the state party apparatus. Instead, establishment North Carolina Republicans were successfully electing more candidates to office than at any point in the state's history in 2010 and 2012. Crucial to the development of the state GOP during this time, state party leaders reached

out to national GOP forces to solicit fundraising and attention on a nationwide scale. For example, Republican Pat McCrory's 2012 gubernatorial campaign heavily relied on national Republican resources. Despite the slew of divisive establishment Republican victories, however, an anti-establishment wing (a mixture of members of the Liberty Caucus and the Tea Party) nevertheless began to grow within the party structure and win elections, like U.S. House member Mark Meadows.

Perhaps owing to the successes gained by the state GOP's relationship with the RNC, North Carolina moved its primaries up two months in an attempt to further expand their footprint on the national political stage. Still in control of the state party, establishment Republican party leaders and elected officials initially hesitated to embrace Donald Trump's presidential campaign. It was well after Trump's presidential victory in which the establishment and anti-establishment wings appeared to unite around Trump, and the state party began to mold itself into a pro-Trump machine: party leadership positions were filled by Republicans with national ties to Trump and PACs, and the party took the reins to lead all state GOPs in the fight against alleged election fraud. Years of support for Trump causes, in addition to delivering the state to Trump in 2016, 2020, and 2024, resulted in North Carolina Republican Party chair Michael Whatley being named co-chair of the RNC in 2024. The North Carolina GOP remains one of Trump's staunchest state allies to this day.

Background Information

North Carolina			
North Carolina Elections		North Carolina Republican Party	
Primary type	Partially closed (Republicans and unaffiliated voters may participate)	**State party officer elections**	Elected by state convention
Presidential/state primaries	Combined event	**State party officer elections schedule**	Odd-numbered years
Presidential delegate allocation	Proportional	**State party convention cycle**	Annually
State election cycle	Presidential/ even-numbered years	**Pre-primary endorsements**	No - banned

North Carolina shares many of the properties as other states in the South. North Carolina has one of the largest populations of African Americans in the nation, which makes up about twenty percent of the state's citizens.[1] Additionally, about 35 percent of North Carolina's citizens are self-described evangelical Christians, placing the state in the top ten states by evangelical affiliation– although it trails behind many of its neighboring Southern states, like Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky.[2] Pew's Religious Landscape Study finds that 41 percent of

[1] "Black Population by State". *Data Pandas*. November 24, 2024.

[2] The Association of Religion Data Archives.

North Carolina's respondents identify as conservative, placing the state at the median across all states' respondents.[3] Typical of other Southern states, however, political ideology often contrasted with how voters aligned with each party. In 1980, for example, 72.4 percent of the state registered as Democrats, 23.5 as Republicans, and just 4.0 percent were unaffiliated. As it stands today, unaffiliated voters (36.9 percent) are now more numerous than both Democrats (32.3 percent) and Republicans (30.0 percent), placing it in the top five states with the largest independent voter population.[4]

North Carolina's elected offices were dominated by the Democratic Party throughout much of the 20th century. Jesse Helms' election to the U.S. Senate in 1972 signified the furthest step forward for North Carolina Republicans to that point. Helms' fundraising prowess, leadership in deserting the Democratic Party when the parties first realigned, and partnerships with many leaders of the religious right made Helms the ideal candidate to introduce two-party politics to the state of North Carolina.[5] That said, Helms' notoriety in national politics contributed to polarized public opinion in his home state: despite his long tenure as a Senator, Helms never won more than 55% of the vote in his reelection campaigns.

Prior political science research tends to lump North Carolina in with its Southern neighbors. Elazar (1966) labeled all political cultures of the South "traditionalistic" and tied the culture of empowering the individual (and corresponding erosion of government programs) all the way back to the role of slavery in the Civil War.[6] Mayhew (1986), similarly to Elazar, paints Southern states with a broad brush: in his case, Southern states may have business and professional communities to influence elections, but lack a history of traditional party organizations.[7] Finally, Gibson et al. (1983) appear to partially capture the changing of the times with the election of Helms in 1972, finding that the organizational capacity of the North Carolina GOP was found to be substantially higher than that of the North Carolina Democratic Party.[8]

1994 was a watershed election year for North Carolina Republicans, who picked up a staggering 26 seats out of the 120-member state house, 13 seats in the 50-member state senate, and four seats in the state's U.S. House delegation. Republican legislative candidates had offered their own, state-specific Contract with America that lifted many ideas from its national counterpart, like cutting benefits and enacting term limits.[9] Despite these overwhelming victories, however, Republicans didn't gain control of both state legislative chambers until 2010's elections brought forth another wave of Republican seat swings. In contrast to the Tea Party movement nationally, however, the Tea Party movement in the state appears extremely limited: the largest successes for any Tea Party-affiliated candidate during 2010 appears to be an open state Senate election and a U.S. House election involving an incumbent plagued by controversy.

After Pat McCrory lost the 2008 gubernatorial election, state Republican Chair Tom Fetzer attributed the loss to poor fundraising by the North Carolina GOP (who was outspent $3

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[3] "2023-24 U.S. Religious Landscape Study Interactive Database". *Pew Research Center*. 2025.
[4] Ballotpedia. Data aggregated from state voter registration statistics published by each state.
[5] Dodsworth, Terry and Nancy Dunne. "Helms may need more than the moral majority / US Republican Senator's bid for control of CBS broadcasting network." *Financial Times (London, England)*, February 19, 1985: 4.
[6] Elazar, Daniel Judah. "American federalism: A view from the states." 1966.
[7] Mayhew, David R. *Placing parties in American politics: Organization, electoral settings, and government activity in the twentieth century*. Princeton University Press. 1986.
[8] Gibson, James L., Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, and Robert J. Huckshorn. "Assessing party organizational strength." *American Journal of Political Science* (1983): 193-222. 1983.
[9] "GOP 'Contract' Is Noble, But Hollow." *Greensboro News & Record*, October 1, 1994: A8.

million to $11 million by the state Democratic Party).[10] When McCrory ran for governor again in 2012, national Republican leaders like Chris Christie, Bobby Jindal, Jeb Bush, and Scott Walker all visited the state to campaign for McCrory.[11] McCrory leaned on his former experience as the mayor of Charlotte to run his campaign as a moderate, establishment Republican–even though McCrory's rightward shift in ideology was well documented–[12] and Democrats attempted to pin him to the Tea Party movement).[13] McCrory also benefited from the lack of a well-funded conservative challenger in the 2012 primary.[14] McCrory heavily outspent his Democratic opposition to win the gubernatorial election by eleven percentage points.[15]

North Carolina's legislature moved its primaries up from May to March in 2016 in an effort to increase the state's relevance to the national GOP primary season.[16] These efforts were partially successful: Donald Trump was an early visitor to North Carolina, speaking at the 2015 state Republican convention mere days before declaring his presidential campaign.[17] Both Trump and Ted Cruz campaigned heavily in the state, and Trump would win the state by three percentage points in a competitive race against Ted Cruz. On the other hand, the proportional allocation of North Carolina Republican delegates meant that Trump secured only two more delegates than runner-up Cruz. Winner-take-all, narratively important primaries like Florida's and Ohio's were held on the same day and dwarfed North Carolina's media coverage. Finally, the breakdown in North Carolina's delegates reveals a contrast between the bases of Cruz and Trump support. Cruz secured the vast majority of delegates that were elected from county and district elections, signifying that the grassroots wing of the party was aligned with him,[18] while Trump won a majority of delegates allocated at the state convention.[19] The exact reason for this disparity is unclear, although turmoil within the state GOP's leadership that year led to the party's executive committee nominating the slate of delegates to be voted on at the state convention.[20] In prior years, the chairman had nominative authority: after the change was made,

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[10] "GOP chairman candidates hoping to refocus Republicans." *Sampson Independent, The (Clinton, NC)*, June 2, 2009: A4.

[11] "McCrory camp says it raised $1.5M in past 6 months." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, January 3, 2012; "Jeb Bush to help McCrory with NC governor bid." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, July 19, 2012; "Wisconsin Gov. Walker to stump for McCrory in Raleigh, Greensboro." *Rocky Mount Telegram (NC)*, September 15, 2012.

[12] Morrill, Jim. "In his 2nd try for governor, a new image for McCrory." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, October 14, 2012: 1A.

[13] Christensen, Rob. "McCrory gets help from Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker stumps with the North Carolina Republican candidate." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, September 26, 2012: 1B.

[14] Robertson, Gary D. "McCrory preps now for NC general election fight." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, April 8, 2012.

[15] Robertson, Gary D. "McCrory besting Dalton in NC governor fundraising." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, October 30, 2012.

[16] E.g. Christensen, Rob. "GOP divided over NC primary date." *Jefferson Post (NC)*, March 1, 2015.

[17] "Fitzsimon: Trump is a symptom." *Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC)*, February 13, 2016.

[18] Morrill, Jim. "Decision 2016 N.C. GOP calls for unity at convention Party officials urge solidarity behind Trump That's still a hard sell for some Republicans." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, May 8, 2016: 6A.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Robertson, Gary D. "N. Carolina Republican delegate process could bring intrigue." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, April 8, 2016.

the chairman at the time accused the executive committee of conspiring against the Tea Party and anti-establishment wing of the state party.[21]

The most recent elections in the state are difficult to evaluate in terms of party strength. On the one hand, Pat McCrory was a one-term governor and two Democratic governors have been elected since then, and the offices of Secretary of State and Attorney General have remained under Democratic control. On the other hand, redistricting efforts by the Republican-led state legislature makes dislodging their majority status unlikely, if not impossible, for the foreseeable future (as discussed in detail below). Furthermore, both U.S. Senate seats have been secured by Republicans and the U.S. House delegation has not leaned in favor of Democrats since 2012. The razor-thin margins in North Carolina's elections have nonetheless produced consistent Republican successes in some areas, and surprising Democratic victories in others.

Election and primary laws

While North Carolina used a closed primary for most of its history, both of North Carolina's major parties allowed unaffiliated voters to choose one party's primary ballot to vote on after 1994,[22] effectively making it a semi-open primary (though the state refers to its primaries as "partially closed"). North Carolina is one of eight states that utilize a runoff for primary elections and is notable for its low trigger threshold– thirty percent of the vote.[23] The governor and lieutenant governor positions are separately elected, so the two roles can be (and have been) occupied by members of opposing political parties, and candidates for each are subject to their own primary campaigns. Candidates for any state judicial position, including the North Carolina Supreme Court, also compete in partisan, primary elections. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor are limited to two four-year terms, but there are no term limits for any other statewide or legislative position. Finally, the state legislature can refer constitutional amendments to the general election, but citizens cannot introduce them (or any other ballot propositions).

Most of North Carolina's municipal elections are held in odd years. Statewide elections are held in even-numbered years, and gubernatorial elections are held in the same year as presidential elections. Campaign finance laws in North Carolina allow for the state parties to spend unlimited amounts of money on candidates, allow for a limited amount of PAC and union spending on candidates, and prohibit corporate contributions. North Carolina's disclosure laws and campaign finance transparency are scored fairly well by the Coalition for Integrity in 2022, placing it 17th among all states by the State Campaign Finance Index.

Two developments in North Carolina election law– redistricting and voter suppression– garnered notoriety for the state in national news. Redistricting has become a frequent target of litigation in North Carolina. After Republicans secured their majorities in both chambers of the state legislature in 2010, maps were redrawn with the intent to secure their electoral success in subsequent years. The redistricting plan implemented in both the 2012 and 2016 elections was

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Mooneyham, Scott. "Parties Making Odd Choices." *News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)*, November 25, 2009: A4.

[23] National Conference of State Legislatures.

accused of being heavily biased in favor of Republican candidates.[24] Crucially, North Carolina is the only state whose governor is unable to veto redistricting bills passed by the legislature– in fact, North Carolina was the last state to grant its governor veto power in any capacity, in 1996.[25]

North Carolina has also gained significant attention for its voter suppression efforts, particularly after *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) struck down certain elements of the Voting Rights Act. Under unified Republican state rule, Governor Pat McCrory signed into law a voter suppression bill in 2013 that added a voter identification requirement, removed same-day voter registration, and reduced the early voting period (among other provisions). Furthermore, a voter identification requirement was approved by voters as a constitutional amendment. Many elements of the voter suppression bill have been subject to legal battles in the following years, but North Carolina's early voting and absentee rules remain among the most restrictive in the country, along with other Southern states.[26] Another provision of the original 2013 voter ID law separated the presidential primary from its other primary elections. The idea was to hold it in February to give the state an opportunity for national relevance in a presidential race, even though this date clashed with the national rules of both major political parties.

Party rules and bylaws

Static features

The North Carolina General Statutes frequently reference state and county party executive committees (with particular emphasis on how vacancies are to be filled) and while there are some mentions of the state chair, the chair's enumerated duties are very light. Neither the party's state central committee nor the finance committee are mentioned, and the statutes appear to make no effort in defining how a party is to organize and structure themselves. Finally, the North Carolina General Statutes create state and county Boards of Elections that include members of each major political party and provide clear guidelines on carrying out elections in the state.

The North Carolina Republican Party highly stratifies itself into multiple party levels. Some semblance of party organization exists at the precinct, county, intrastate jurisdictional districts (where they do not overlap with existing geopolitical boundaries), congressional district, and state level. Each lower level of the party is deferential to its immediate higher level in some way; for example, precinct officers abide by their county GOP's plan of organization, and county plans of organization are audited by the state party. All levels of the party have their own officers, and all levels aside from the precincts have an executive committee. The state party itself consists of three governing bodies: the state central committee, the state executive committee, and the state finance committee.

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[24] Robertson, Gary D. "Lawsuit: Too much party bias in North Carolina Congress map". *Associated Press*. August 5, 2016.

[25] Chase, Randall. "Veto for N.C. governor tops list of new laws in 1997." *Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)*, December 31, 1996: C1.

[26] Nott, Lata. "CLC Releases Report on Voting Access in All 50 States". *Campaign Legal Center*. September 21, 2022.

Many state parties divide their leadership bodies into two: a larger state central committee and a smaller state executive committee. For the North Carolina GOP their nomenclature runs counter to these labels: their state central committee as they define it resembles the executive committee of other state parties, and their executive committee resembles other states' central committees. The state central committee in North Carolina is composed of approximately thirty members and meets at least every other month. The central committee's duties include appointing members to committees and formulating fiscal policy. On the other hand, the state executive committee is composed of several hundred members, including the entire state central committee, all county chairs and vice-chairs, and all Republican elected officials in the state, but they only meet twice per year. The key duties of the executive committee are to finalize the budget proposed by the central committee and to delegate any plans and measures to the central committee. The state executive committee is given "supreme management of all affairs of the party within the state", while the state central committee is authorized to execute the will of the larger state executive committee.

The state chair's largest responsibility is to liaise with the central committee, the executive committee, and all of the other levels of the party organization. The chair presides over executive committee meetings and carries out their directives, but is also checked by the state central committee. While some duties are unconditionally given to the chair, such as appointing the temporary officers of the state convention, a large amount of the chair's power is subject to oversight from the committees. In this way, it would appear that the state chair position of the North Carolina GOP is oriented around politicking between and within the state party's many moving parts to carry out the orders assigned to them. The combined authority of the chair and the executive committee would make it difficult for any emerging grassroots Republicans to amass enough representation in any given election year.

The North Carolina Republican Party places a large emphasis on conventions, ranging from precinct meetings to the state convention. Officers across all party levels are elected in odd years at conventions. Precinct meetings have a quorum of one person– meaning that as long as the corresponding county's plan of organization allows it, a single person may constitute the membership of the entire precinct committee as well as a delegate to the county convention. Therefore, the potential for intraparty insurgency via precinct-level organization appears quite high– although I find little evidence of large-scale coordination among precinct meetings in the time period of study. All plans of organization are approved at the relevant party organization's convention, as well, although all lower levels of the party apparatus are ultimately deferential to the state party. Detailed timelines for each convention, its procedures, and how they culminate in the state convention are laid out in the bylaws. In the most recent bylaws, the focus has turned toward election integrity as a party issue, which I discuss in greater detail in the next section.

Dynamic features

Seventeen versions of the North Carolina Republican Party's plans of organization since 1995 have been located. Changes to the plan of organization from 1995 to 2004 are frequent, although the magnitude of such changes is low: many of them simply seek to clarify existing language or to provide more detail to a rule. The most interesting throughline in the 2000 plan of organization is the creation of rules for annual meetings. The North Carolina GOP's emphasis on these annual meetings reflects a more professionalized party that seeks to function as an organization year-over-year, regardless of national electoral context. Further development of the

party organization can be seen in other changes during this period; for example, oversight and accountability procedures with built-in deference to the state level of the party were added.

No changes to the plan were made from 2004 through 2009. However, 2010's bylaws represented a significant change across the entire party structure with regard to the supremacy of some party levels over others, as well as the method of allocating delegates for the state convention. The exact timing of 2010's rule changes are ambiguous: the plan of organization became in effect immediately upon the adjournment of the state convention on June 4th, 2010, but the plan credits the 2009 plan of organization committee for their contributions. Therefore, it is possible that none of the changes made in 2010 were in response to the national Tea Party movement. On the other hand, there is evidence of a vocal minority of Ron Paul support in the state in 2008. Paul himself visited multiple times, fundraised relatively well in the state, and his supporters sparred with the North Carolina GOP establishment for weeks after the May 2008 primary.[27] Groups supporting Ron Paul at the time indicated that while Paul's odds of winning the presidential nomination were nil, their focus was on "instilling his ideas into local Republican politics".[28] Therefore, it is more likely that any changes to the plan of organization in 2010 were not due to the Tea Party, but to an emergent Ron Paul/Republican Liberty Caucus contingent in the state and local levels of the Republican party.

The North Carolina GOP's 2010 plan of organization established a clearer hierarchy between party levels. For example, county parties were given the ability to co-opt any precinct-level party in their jurisdiction that "fails to properly organize" or has a chair who "fails to act", neither of which are defined by the plan of organization. The county parties, in turn, must defer to the state party's plan of organization when the county plan is insufficient, and the state central committee was granted "supreme management of all affairs of the Party within the State". Finally, two rule changes applied to all party activities in 2010. First, proxy voting was banned from all party votes and activities. Second, the party disloyalty policy softened so that members may now support one Republican candidate over another in a contested primary without incurring punishment. I believe that each of these changes are examples of policies that could have helped the establishment wing of a party to retain control in the face of insurgent grassroots members who could have sought to mobilize votes and promote candidates at the local level. Mere weeks after the 2010 plan of organization was approved, for example, establishment GOP leaders helped influence the outcome of a primary runoff election by opposing an extreme candidate with Tea Party credentials.[29]

The method by which delegate counts are allocated across all levels of the party also fundamentally changed in 2010's bylaws. Previously, individual party organizations gained delegates to conventions based on the number of votes for the Republican gubernatorial candidate in the party's jurisdiction (e.g. votes from a county or congressional district) in the last gubernatorial election. The 2010 changes removed the gubernatorial vote count allocation method by instead allocating delegates based on the number of registered Republicans in the party's jurisdiction. As of when the method was changed in 2010, the most recent Republican candidate to have won a gubernatorial election was Gov. Jim Martin's reelection in 1988, so moving away from delegate allocation based on gubernatorial votes seems sensible. However, the change potentially affects the composition of the state party delegation to be more nationally-

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[27] E.g. Way, Dan E. "Paul's revolution rolls into town: Long-shot White House hopeful says campaign is 'all about freedom'." *Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)*, May 3, 2008: B1.

[28] Scott, Sam. "Ron Paul cured their apathy." *Star-News (Wilmington, NC)*, May 4, 2008.

[29] "Johnson, Randall, Dority win GOP spots in N.C. House runoffs." *Rocky Mount Telegram (NC)*, June 22, 2010.

focused. County and district parties now stand to gain more state-level party representation by voter registration efforts, which might be done most efficiently by promoting the national Republican Party and its platform. Therefore, the incentive structure for sub-state parties could have shifted to prioritize the national Republican brand over building support for the Republican gubernatorial candidate and their state-specific platform.

Next, the largest number of changes to the plan in any individual year came after the 2016 election, with over fifty edits, additions, or deletions. Generally, the changes appear to restrict the diversity of opinions offered within the party. Changing the plan of organization as a rank-and-file party member became much more difficult: any unscheduled business previously required a two-thirds vote by the state convention, but now the propounder of the change must additionally provide a minimum of 1,000 copies of the proposed agenda item. The chair of the party was empowered by gaining the role of "primary fundraiser" for the party and shedding a requirement to keep a permanent financial record for oversight purposes. Other changes in 2016 introduced residency and registered voter requirements. Delegates must attend their assigned precinct meeting in person to be elected; all names and addresses of precinct officers are required for verification purposes; and any candidate for party office, including county-level delegates, must now be registered Republicans. Finally, the North Carolina GOP voted for the executive committee to nominate the state's Republican delegates for the state convention to approve; previously, this was the chair's power. The slew of changes implemented in this edition of the bylaws is owed to a combination of a reshaping of the party to Donald Trump's benefit after the 2016 presidential election and a power struggle involving an embattled party chair at the time, both of which I will explore in greater detail.

The most recent changes to North Carolina GOP's plan of organization focus on election integrity measures and loyalty. Leading this effort is the addition of a "general counsel" position to not only the state party officers, but to all district and county parties as well. General counselors are to be licensed attorneys in North Carolina (or, as a backup, a "person familiar with election procedures") and serve as the chief election integrity officer of their party, 115 in all. Interestingly, the addition of general counselors occurred in 2020– months before the general election, when election denialism became more nationally salient. The early movement of the North Carolina GOP to attack elections signals close cooperation with Trump, who had similarly warned of elected fraud in the months prior to his loss in the 2020 presidential election. Later, 2022's bylaws introduced two policies enforcing party loyalty. First, an "automatic resignation" clause was added whereby any party member campaigning for a non-Republican candidate against a Republican one is automatically removed from their position, bypassing any committee removal vote. Second, a rule was passed disqualifying any Republican candidate that was not a registered Republican as of January 31st of the year prior to the election they are a candidate for.

Intraparty Conflicts in the North Carolina State Republican Party

Jesse Helms' mixed influence in the North Carolina GOP

When Jesse Helms was elected in 1972, he and other social conservatives from eastern North Carolina clashed against moderate, establishment Republicans, such as former state party chair and Governor James Holshouser in the 1970s and Governor Jim Martin in the 1980s and 1990s.[30] The battle for party control was waged mostly in elections for party chair. Helms supporter Jack Lee ran unopposed for chair in 1977 and helped to mold the state party in the socially conservative image of Helms and Ronald Reagan;[31] in 1987, on the other hand, a protracted argument about chair candidates culminated in moderate Jack Hawke being elected amid shouting matches and questionable nomination procedures on the state convention floor.[32] Contesting primaries was not a strategy employed by either faction: the closest example was the 1986 U.S. Senate primary, in which Jim Broyhill (the establishment choice) easily defeated David Funderburk. Funderburk had the support of Jesse Helms' political organization, the Congressional Club– but, significantly, not Helms himself, who was adamant about staying uninvolved in party primaries.[33]

The Congressional Club (which, at various points, was also called the Congressional Club of North Carolina, the National Congressional Club, and the National Conservative Club) began as a fundraising vehicle for Helms to pay off any outstanding debts from his 1972 election.[34] Headed by Carter Wrenn and Tom Ellis the entire time it was in the political spotlight, the Club quickly expanded in scope by supporting other state and local North Carolina candidates, then candidates in other states, and finally presidential campaigns by supporting Ronald Reagan in 1976 and 1980.[35] The power of the Congressional Club rested in its innovation of soliciting money nationally through direct mail and newsletter campaigns: over half of the contributing members of the Club were from outside of North Carolina.[36] Accruing a mailing list of over 500,000 by the 1990s,[37] newsletters often included updates from Helms himself as well as guest columns from Republican candidates for office across the country. The Congressional Club developed a reputation for its reactionary style of fundraising, both in its newsletters and television ad campaigns. The Club's controversial 1990 "white hands" ad appealed to whites' fear of minority quotas when seeking employment, and their newsletter often invoked their fight against liberal groups and immoral behavior.[38]

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[30] Prysby, Charles. "North Carolina". In *State party profiles: a 50-state guide to development, organization, and resources*. (1997).

[31] Jacobs, Chick. "Ex-Fayetteville mayor had statewide influence." *Fayetteville Observer, The (NC)*, June 12, 2014.

[32] Funk, Tim. "GOP Ratifies Martin's Choice to Lead Party - Jack Hawke Gets Interim Position Despite Conservatives' Attempts to Pick Another". *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, February 1, 1987: 1C.

[33] Arthur, Bill. "Fighter for the Right: Helms Discusses Conservative View." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, March 1, 1987: 1B.

[34] Dodsworth, Terry and Nancy Dunne. "Helms may need more than the moral majority / US Republican Senator's bid for control of CBS broadcasting network." *Financial Times (London, England)*, February 19, 1985: 4.

[35] Eudy, Ken. "GOP Slugfest Possible in Race for East's Seat." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, September 19, 1985: 1; Morrilll, Jim. "Congressional Club Plans to Hit at Dukakis During Convention". *The Charlotte Observer*. July 9, 1988.

[36] Morrill, Jim and Ted Mellnik. "In Raising Money, Helms' Reach is National". *The Charlotte Observer*. June 10, 1990.

[37] Monk, John and Jim Morrill. "Rift in Helms Network May Rattle N.C. Politics - Faircloth Also Breaks Off With Wrenn." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, October 2, 1994: 1A.

[38] Sullivan, Christopher. "Jesse Helms at root of new Republicans' agenda; While the country changed, Tar Heel senator stayed with his battle-tested conservatism." *Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)*, January 1, 1995: C6.

The conservative wing surged back to the fore in the 1990s. The impetus for such a movement occurred in late 1991, when Pat Robertson assembled hundreds of supporters to begin developing the Christian Coalition in the state.[39] The Southern director of the Coalition stated that the goal was to "train Christians" and "build grassroots organizations in each precinct and each neighborhood".[40] As a result, the Christian Coalition had become an organized force in many county Republican parties.[41] A few electoral successes followed, none greater than a strong performance by North Carolina Republicans in 1994 that evangelical Christians claimed credit for.[42] Amidst expectations that voter turnout would be low in a year in which North Carolina had no statewide "headliner" races, the Christian Coalition distributed their voter's guide to "hundreds of churches" that year and seemed to thrive in low-turnout conditions.[43]

The relationship between Jesse Helms and national conservative activists is important to understand Christian Right involvement in the state. Helms was closely tied to Phyllis Schlafly and the socially conservative Eagle Forum when they worked as one to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982,[44] and both Schlafly and Helms were instrumental in drafting the national Republican platform in 1984.[45] In Jerry Falwell's efforts to promote Christian Right issues to the forefront of national politics, Helms' 1984 reelection campaign was heavily promoted.[46] The Senate campaign would end up as the most expensive non-presidential election in American history at the time.[47] Finally, Helms' Congressional Club lobbied on behalf of Pat Robertson during a North Carolina GOP dispute over delegates during Robertson's 1988 primary campaign,[48] and Robertson hired a Helms protegee to run his campaign in the state.[49] All four of Schlafly, Falwell, Robertson, and Helms were board members of the Council for National Policy, which began in 1981 to support Republican and Christian Right policies.[50]

Helms' willingness to work with national Christian organizations underscores a broader pursuit for ideological goals over electoral success and party building, especially in North Carolina. Helms' political agenda was expansive: while he was known for being the largest advocate in the Senate for social and moral issues, Helms also sought a litany of foreign policies, such as supporting the South African government during apartheid and opposing communism at

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[39] Christensen, Rob. "Robertson makes a new N.C. pitch." *The News & Observer*, November 13, 1991: B1.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Prysby, Charles. "North Carolina". In *State party profiles: a 50-state guide to development, organization, and resources*. (1997).

[42] Saker, Anne. "Political talk fills halls at Baptist meeting." *The News & Observer*, November 12, 1994: A3.

[43] Christensen, Rob. "Election turnout targeted." *The News & Observer*, November 7, 1994: A1.

[44] Koza, Patricia. "One by one, senators rose to speak today, assuring...." *UPI (USA)*, July 1, 1982.

[45] Shore, Benjamin. "The Republican platform moves to the right." *San Diego Union, The (CA)*, August 26, 1984: C-1.

[46] Eudy, Ken. "Moral Majority Courting Voters." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, August 8, 1985: 20.

[47] Ziegler, Ruth. "Jesse Helms: The Meaning of His Money". *Southern Exposure*. January/February 1985.

[48] Funk, Tim. "N.C. GOP Meeting Fails to Resolve Bush-Robertson Delegate Dispute." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, March 16, 1988: 2C.

[49] "Robertson Names Former Worker In Helms Group To Head N.C. Staff." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, October 28, 1987: 7B.

[50] Chardy, Alfonso. "Contras Get Increasing Private Aid - Wealthy Donors Giving Rebels Up To $1 Million Monthly." *Miami Herald, The (FL)*, January 21, 1985: 5A.

every turn.[51] Helms' embrace of populist ideals, coupled with his Congressional Club, made him an effective fundraiser at the national level. A frequent critic of the press (including a short-lived effort to take over the entire CBS network to remove its perceived liberal bias),[52] Helms clearly preferred the unimpeded avenue of communication he already had in his possession: the Congressional Club newsletter. Due to its success at raising money nationally and endorsing candidates on their own, the Club also preferred to operate independently. Even after the Congressional Club and Helms severed ties in 1994, each remained in national circles. The Congressional Club became the machinery behind Steve Forbes' presidential campaign in 1996,[53] and Helms became the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee after fifteen years of service as a member.[54]

Due to Helms' unwillingness to engage with the state GOP, the party remained in establishment control throughout much of the 1990s. When a handful of religious conservatives gained seats on a county party committee in 1995, state party leadership was both accepting of the faction and insistent that they stay away from attacking fellow Republicans.[55] Jack Hawke, the moderate chair elected in 1987, served until 1995 before resigning to become a lobbyist.[56] In the period of heightened interest and activity in the Republican party following its success in the 1994 elections, Jim Hastings– the lone moderate– was elected chair on the first ballot over three more conservative candidates.[57] Almost immediately, Hastings was prosecuted for tax evasion and a Helms protegee– Sam Currin– was elected over the interim chair to replace him.[58] Currin won by 157 votes to 152 by building a coalition including the Helms network of party leaders, members of the Christian Coalition, and supporters of the moderate previous chair Hastings.[59] In 1999, Currin was ousted and replaced by Republican Bill Cobey.[60] Cobey was a former U.S. House member with deeply conservative credentials, though ran against Currin and the religious faction by arguing that their anti-abortion stance divided the party.[61]

To conclude, the extent of Christian Right involvement in the North Carolina Republican Party is sporadic. Despite North Carolina's large base for socially conservative ideals, neither the most powerful organizations nor the most powerful Republican in the state opted to work within

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[51] McCormally, Sean. "Helms lumps Tutu, ANC in communist camp." *UPI (USA)*, June 22, 1986; E.g. Goldsborough, James O. "Isolationists are in full control of the GOP." *San Diego Union-Tribune, The (CA)*, November 1, 1999: B-7.

[52] Dodsworth, Terry and Nancy Dunne. "Helms may need more than the moral majority / US Republican Senator's bid for control of CBS broadcasting network." *Financial Times (London, England)*, February 19, 1985: 4.

[53] Christensen, Rob. "Forbes' fabulous rise is Conservative Club's comeback." *The News & Observer*, January 29, 1996: A3.

[54] Sullivan, Christopher. "And Then There's…Jesse." *Columbian, The (Vancouver, WA)*, January 1, 1995: B1.

[55] Mitchell, Kirsten B. "Christian Coalition Impact Not Yet Clear." *Star-News (Wilmington, NC)*, March 20, 1995: 1A, 4A.

[56] "State Republican Party chairman resigns." *Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)*, February 5, 1995: B9.

[57] Lineberry, Danny. "N.C. GOP elects Hastings, Boone businessman, to lead - Helms touts prayer on last day of state meeting in Durham." *Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)*, May 21, 1995: A1.

[58] Christensen, Rob. "GOP's tradition of rough-and-tumble politics continues." *The News & Observer*, February 5, 1996: A3.

[59] Christensen, Rob. "Upset win puts Helms ally in driver's seat of state GOP." *The News & Observer*, February 11, 1996: B1.

[60] "Chapel Hill Republican wins N.C. party chair Recent GOP losses, centrist support give edge to Cobey." *Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)*, May 23, 1999: B6.

[61] Ibid.

the confines of the Republican party. Groups like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition were able to mobilize and contribute to the successes of Republican candidates without affecting much of the party organization itself. The Congressional Club quickly grew beyond the confines of the state due to its overwhelming fundraising success at a national scale, and saw little reason to box itself back in by getting involved in state Republican politics. As for Jesse Helms, the pursuit of both his national and international ideological agendas left little time for any party involvement. Helms even considered minor efforts, like endorsements for party chair or support for primary election candidates, to be outside of his duty. In Helms' own words,

"I'm not a politician. I'm really not, and I'm not interested in it. I am interested in the conservative philosophy, period. The free-enterprise philosophy, period. And I see it as my role to be consistent in supporting that, despite all the criticism. And I think I have been fairly consistent." [62]

The limited Tea Party movement in North Carolina

As mentioned already, there was almost no trace of Tea Party influence in North Carolina's elections in 2010. The most important election in the state that year was incumbent Senator Richard Burr, who secured reelection by over ten percentage points in a race that was at no point seriously contested. As mentioned earlier, however, Ron Paul's 2008 presidential campaign and subsequent actions taken by the North Carolina GOP nonetheless affected how the Tea Party could otherwise have influenced the state party in subsequent years. Paul supporters in the state were hardly a domineering force in the party, but opposition was raised at the 2008 convention to seat more Paul delegates than what the establishment wing was giving them.[63] The sweeping changes made to the party structure are unlikely to be apropos of nothing– the party plan of organization had previously been unaltered since 2004. Instead, it seems likely that the North Carolina GOP, acting in response to the surge in new Ron Paul supporters in the party, may have inadvertently defended itself from any Tea Party networks that might have been forming the year after.

Much of the party's discourse in 2009 focused on whether to close off primary elections to unaffiliated voters.[64] However, the impetus for such a change is unclear. The resolution from the party itself cites the concern that the inclusion of unaffiliated voters results in more moderate candidates being elected.[65] 2008's election cycle wasn't favorable to Republicans, but none of the losses could be reasonably attributed to overly moderate candidates. The unpopularity of George W. Bush's administration made for troublesome headwinds among Republicans across the country.[66] Furthermore, the largest Republican losses in North Carolina– Governor, Lieutenant Governor, a Senate seat, and a House seat– were lost by Pat McCrory and three

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[62] Arthur, Bill. "Fighter for the Right: Helms Discusses Conservative View." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, March 1, 1987: 1B.

[63] Romoser, James. "Paul's Backers, N.C. GOP At Odds - They Clash With Party Over Number of Delegates, Even As Candidate Ends His Campaign." *Winston-Salem Journal (NC)*, June 13, 2008: 1.

[64] Mooneyham, Scott. "Parties Making Odd Choices." *News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)*, November 25, 2009: A4.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Jacobson, Gary C. "The 2008 presidential and congressional elections: Anti-Bush referendum and prospects for the Democratic majority." *Pol. Sci. Q.* 124 (2009): 1.

Republicans with decades of conservative credentials.[67] The push to close the party's primary would certainly result in the loss of participation by moderate unaffiliated voters, but it could also represent another method by which to exclude Ron Paul supporters from the party, who tended to be registered independents more so than supporters of other Republican candidates.[68] Ultimately, the state executive committee overwhelmingly rejected the resolution to close the primary.[69] Nevertheless, the lengthy debate nonetheless underscores the trepidation of the party to widen their ranks.

Despite failing to infiltrate the party through grassroots means in 2010, Tea Party networks were present in North Carolina years later. For example, Tea Party groups protested the state legislature in 2013 in favor of exempting North Carolina from the Affordable Care Act under the theoretical purview of nullification.[70] In contrast to Tea Party protests in other states, however, the protests revealed agreement between the Tea Party movement and North Carolina elected and party officials instead of hostility between the two camps. At one such rally, several Republican state legislators and the chair of the state party were all speakers, their ire directed firmly at those across the aisle and not within their ranks.[71] There are multiple possible explanations for this relationship: the Tea Party networks in the state didn't target incumbent Republicans, Republican elected officials co-opted Tea Party talking points to avoid being targeted, or Republican state legislators were already in alignment with Tea Party ideology.

In subsequent elections, the Tea Party continued to have little success in the state. There are no cases across North Carolina House of Representatives or North Carolina Senate primaries in which a Tea Party candidate competes with another Republican candidate in the primary election and wins. In larger elections, the Tea Party was more visible but not necessarily more successful. For example, Mark Meadows was challenged by a Tea Party candidate in an open race for North Carolina's 11th congressional district, one of the safest Republican districts in the state, in 2012. After Meadows decisively won the primary runoff election, the Tea Party Express switched to endorse him.[72] Meadows' conservative record in the years since, including his co-founding of the House Freedom Caucus in 2015,[73] raises the question of why Meadows drew Tea Party opposition in the first place.

In 2014, Thom Tillis ran against a Tea Party candidate and an evangelical candidate in the Republican U.S. Senate primary.[74] With strong establishment support, Tillis won the primary comfortably and eventually defeated incumbent Democratic Senator Kay Hagan in the general election. The same Tea Party candidate that ran against Tillis challenged Richard Burr for the other U.S. Senate seat in 2016, but lost in the primary by a much wider margin. It would seem that Tea Party networks failed to ingratiate themselves into the Republican party framework and

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[67] Christensen, Rob. "Energetic Pittenger Thrives on Promoting His Viewpoint." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, October 23, 2008: 1B; Christensen, Rob and David Raynor. "Growth transforms state GOP's identity." *News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)*, November 5, 2006: A1.

[68] Chamberlain, Adam. "An Inside-Outsider or an Outside-Insider? The Republican Primary Campaign of Ron Paul from a Third-Party Perspective." *Politics & Policy* 38, no. 1 (2010): 97-116.

[69] "State GOP is wise to keep primaries open." *Mt. Airy News, The (NC)*, November 27, 2009: 4A.

[70] Fitzsimon, Chris. "Modern-Day Nullifiers Deserve Rejection." *Pilot, The (Southern Pines, NC)*, January 30, 2013.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Moss, Bill. "Tea Party voters reject Patterson". *Hendersonville Lightning*. June 24, 2012.

[73] "House Republicans Form House Freedom Caucus." *Targeted News Service (USA)*, January 26, 2015.

[74] Christensen, Rob. "In battle for GOP's soul, tea party's grip loosens - To win Senate, candidates avoid ideological brawl." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, May 4, 2014: 26A.

pose any real threat in elections. North Carolina's Tea Party networks appeared to lack the grassroots infrastructure required to provide a solid base of voter support or to field candidates to compete at lower levels of elected office, underscored by the state GOP's organizational structure that made it difficult to do so.

Finally, the state party leadership during this time indicates stable establishment control. Tom Fetzer, serving from 2009 to 2011, was a longtime Republican operative in the state and served as the mayor of Raleigh for over fifteen years.[75] Fetzer would emerge victorious in a scathing chair race in part due to overwhelming support from establishment Republicans in the state.[76] Next, Robin Hayes (2011-2013) ran against Tea Party opposition that was bankrolled by a disgruntled former Republican candidate,[77] but still crushed the other three candidates with over 70 percent of the total vote.[78] Finally, Claude Pope (2013-2015) was Governor McCrory's pick for chair, and endorsements from other elected Republicans followed suit.[79] Again, the establishment-backed Pope handily defeated token Tea Party opposition; yet, in a potential sign of the growth of insurgent forces, the vice chair elected was a conservative activist who served as the FreedomWorks grassroots coordinator for the state.[80]

The North Carolina GOP's close working relationship with Donald Trump

In 2015, the clear establishment candidate Craig Collins lost the state chair election to a political outsider, Hasan Harnett, in what may well have been a bellwether for further intraparty discord. By a host of different metrics, Collins was an overwhelming favorite for chair. A self-described "pro-life, pro-family, pro-economy, and pro-business" candidate,[81] Collins was an intern in the Reagan administration and a leader among North Carolina's Young Republicans.[82] Collins had been elected and re-elected to serve as a district attorney in North Carolina since 2006.[83] Collins also came with prior party leadership experience, serving as the chair of his county's, then his district's, Republican parties.[84] He had the endorsement of McCrory, Senators Tillis and Burr, and the leadership of the State Assembly once state chair Claude Pope

[75] "Ex-mayor of Raleigh seeks N.C. GOP chair." *News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)*, March 11, 2009: B3.

[76] Christensen, Rob. "Fetzer Takes Reins of State GOP." *News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)*, June 14, 2009: B1.

[77] Morrill, Jim. "D'Annunzio funding effort against Hayes He paid for tea party-backed ad against ex-congressman's bid to lead N.C. Republicans." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, January 14, 2011: 1B.

[78] "Hayes wins N.C. Republican Party chairman post." *Rocky Mount Telegram (NC)*, January 15, 2011.

[79] "Forsyth resident named to GOP slot." *Winston-Salem Journal (NC)*, June 9, 2013: 4.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Murphy, Mary Katherine. "GOP celebrates gains at convention." *Laurinburg Exchange, The (NC)*, March 16, 2015.

[82] Smith, Gina. "Gaston/Lincoln News." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, March 20, 2011: 5L.

[83] North Carolina State Board of Elections.

[84] Morrill, Jim. "The Source on politics." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, March 22, 2015: 26A.

announced his intention to not seek reelection.[85] Before Collins conceded the election, Harnett was leading with 700 votes to Collins' 562.[86]

Why did delegates at the state convention seemingly throw caution into the wind by electing a political newcomer in a time when Republican strength in North Carolina was at its highest point in state history? Harnett's largest credentials were managing a congressional candidate's campaign in 2014 and serving as the minority outreach director for the state party,[87] although he had only been a registered Republican since switching from the Democratic Party in 2010.[88] Statements from Republicans at the time attributed Harnett's success to his efforts to contact convention delegates and ingratiate himself with local activists,[89] but a group-oriented explanation may offer a more direct account of Harnett's monumental upset victory. Two overlapping, but nonetheless distinct, wings were able to combine forces to eke out a win over establishment convention voters: the libertarian Republican Liberty Caucus and the Tea Party. The Caucus had independently operated in the state since 2000, but became a greater force within the state GOP with the emergence of Ron Paul's 2008 presidential campaign.[90] The Republican Liberty Caucus alone was estimated by a Republican state leader to represent about 25 percent of the delegates in attendance at the state convention.[91]

The earliest print evidence of both groups working together is in January 2013, with a posting advertising a free event hosted by both groups to instruct members on the nuances of the GOP delegate process.[92] A January 2014 article claims that the Republican Liberty Caucus had previously been offered privileges within the formal state GOP organization, but that they declined in order to maintain their independence.[93] However, the Caucus still endeavored to send their delegates to Republican conventions in order to influence party rules and the platform.[94] As already discussed, the Tea Party groups operating in North Carolina at the time were generally unorganized and not considered influential within the state party; however, it is apparent that a combination of the two groups' delegates, plus Harnett's own efforts, were enough to push Harnett to victory as the new state party chair. Harnett ran an anti-establishment campaign which helped to unite both of the smaller factions against Collins.

During Harnett's tenure, a primary reform bill in the state legislature spurred fissures between the state party and Republican elected officials.[95] The bill, which originally proposed

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[85] Robertson, Gary D. "NC Republican Party will have new chairman in June." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, March 9, 2015.

[86] "North Carolina GOP elects 1st black chairman." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, June 6, 2015.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Morrill, Jim. "The new face of the N.C. GOP is former Democrat Harnett becomes first African-American to head state Republican party." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, June 13, 2015: 1A.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ferreri-Hanbery, Brendan. "Libertarian-leaning group in Raleigh hopes to be chartered." *Charlotte Examiner (NC)*, January 17, 2014.

[91] "North Carolina GOP elects 1st black chairman." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, June 6, 2015.

[92] "Jan. 24 Community News." *Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC)*, January 24, 2013.

[93] Ferreri-Hanbery, Brendan. "Libertarian-leaning group in Raleigh hopes to be chartered." *Charlotte Examiner (NC)*, January 17, 2014.

[94] Ibid.

[95] "N. Carolina lawmakers, party chairman talk unity after flap." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, September 30, 2015.

holding primaries in February, instead set the date of the North Carolina presidential primary in March so that each major political party could avoid noncompliance with the rules set by their national party organizations.[96] An indirect effect of the bill's passage was moving up the filing period for all primary candidates by two months, making it more difficult for outsider candidates to gather resources for a primary challenge.[97] The bill also established the awarding of primary delegates on a winner-take-all basis as the default method (although both state parties opted back into proportional allocation for the 2016 primary elections).[98] Finally, a provision in the law allowed for the creation of "affiliated party committees", like a Senate Republican Caucus, to raise campaign funds without going through the state parties.[99] The conservative Harnett, on behalf of the North Carolina GOP, took umbrage with the bill and clashed publicly with Republican legislative leaders.[100]

Harnett lasted less than a year into his term as chair of the party. Members of the North Carolina GOP, many of which represented the establishment wing of the party, cited eight violations of party rules committed by Harnett.[101] Claims of violations include attempting to remove party members without conforming to party procedures, changing the price of convention fees unilaterally, and redirecting the state party website link to Harnett's own.[102] Before Harnett's ouster in April of 2016, he had already been subjected to a vote of no confidence, had his chair roles restricted, and was banned from party headquarters.[103] Harnett's removal by a two-thirds majority of the 300 executive committee members in attendance underscores the ideological divide between the committee and the convention delegates who elected Harnett by a comfortable margin ten months prior.[104] In a show of establishment strength, seven former party chairs urged party leaders to oust Harnett, including Robin Hayes.[105] Hayes was then elected to replace Harnett, having previously served as party chair from 2011 to 2013.[106] Nonetheless, the turbulence within the party– the establishment-oriented executive committee against the more extreme local-level convention attendees– may have been a precursor to an early wave of pro-Trump sentiment in the North Carolina GOP.

There was a lack of strong state leadership in the buildup to the March 2016 Republican presidential primary in North Carolina. Significant Republicans in the state, like Governor

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[96] Robertson, Gary D. "Legislators vote for all North Carolina primaries in March." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, September 24, 2015.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Knopf, Taylor. "Concern sparked on political accounts - A last-minute bill add-on would allow 'affiliate party committees' controlled by top legislative powers - Campaign watchdog: Republican lawmakers are expanding 'pay-to-play' politics." *News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)*, September 26, 2015: 2A.

[101] Bonner, Lynn. "Politics - NCGOP Central Committee votes 'no confidence' in chairman Harnett - Party chairman's duties restricted, and he is censured - Petition to remove him is circulating - Harnett says on Facebook that his NCGOP email has been disabled again." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, March 22, 2016: 9A.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] "The Latest: Former congressman Hayes back as party chairman." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, April 30, 2016.

[105] Tribune, McClatchy. "Ex-GOP chairs call for ouster of Harnett." *Winston-Salem Journal (NC)*, April 26, 2016: 2.

[106] "The Latest: Former congressman Hayes back as party chairman." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, April 30, 2016.

McCrory and Senator Richard Burr, refused to endorse a candidate before the North Carolina primary.[107] Others, like Senator Thom Tillis, endorsed Marco Rubio–[108] a largely symbolic gesture at that point in the race, considering Rubio's low chances of victory. I find no evidence of any North Carolina Republican leader supporting Trump before the North Carolina primary, which otherwise may have explained the party's predilection toward Trump in subsequent years. Once Trump became the presumptive nominee, however, North Carolina Republicans sought to unite around him. For example, both Burr and Tillis urged support for Trump at the state GOP convention that May: Burr said that getting behind Trump is "absolutely essential", and Tillis accused those not supporting Trump of being RINOs.[109]

At a crossroads in the wake of Trump's 2016 election victory, most North Carolina GOP leaders leaned further into support for Trump. Chair Robin Hayes met with Trump in the Oval Office in May of 2017, part of a select few leaders of other state parties.[110] Additionally, almost the entire Republican delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives supported every piece of Trump's legislative agenda, none more so than Representative Mark Meadows.[111] During the 115th U.S. Congress, Meadows emerged as one of Trump's greatest allies in the House of Representatives.[112] Meadows would then become a confidant of Trump before ultimately being named Trump's chief of staff in 2020.[113]

Despite Hayes' support of Trump, it was the election of his successor, Michael Whatley, that transformed the state GOP into a seemingly Trump-driven operation. Elected chair in 2019 over two other candidates, Whatley came with decades of Republican political experience and was one of the few early Trump supporters in the state.[114] Despite being a North Carolina native, Whatley's operation of a large pro-business PAC privileged relationships to nationally-known, conservative Republicans, like Newt Gingrich and Ryan Zinke,[115] over the development of state-specific political acumen. One losing candidate for chair called Whatley a "neophyte with party activities in North Carolina"; the other losing candidate in the race warned that Whatley's message to "reset" the party would lose "a lot of institutional knowledge" as a result of "throwing out everyone who knows how the party structure works".[116] Whatley won the chair

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[107] Funk, Tim. "Decision 2016 - Trump worries N.C. GOP leaders - Party establishment 'scared' Donald Trump could hurt state Republican candidates in fall - Others disagree, point to record turnouts as Trump wins primaries - N.C. voters will get their say in state's March 15 primary." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, March 6, 2016: 1A.

[108] Clark, Doug. "Primary elections deliver a sucker punch to our state." *Greensboro News & Record (NC)*, March 15, 2016.

[109] Robertson, Gary D. "Burr, Tillis urge unity within fractured North Carolina GOP." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, May 7, 2016.

[110] Bruggeman, Karyn. "GOP Swing State Party Chairs Met With Trump." *National Journal: Hotline Latest Edition (USA)*, May 19, 2017.

[111] "Tracking Congress In The Age Of Trump". *FiveThirtyEight*.

[112] Murphy, Brian and Dan Kane. "NC's Meadows, a Trump ally, to retire from US House." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, December 20, 2019: 4A.

[113] Miller, Zeke. "Trump names Rep. Mark Meadows his new chief of staff." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, March 7, 2020.

[114] Morrill, Jim and Anna Pogarcic. "Michael Whatley elected new chair of NC Republican Party, calls for a 'reset'." *Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)*, June 8, 2019.

[115] Morrill, Jim. "NC Republicans looking for 'fresh start' when they pick new chairman this weekend." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, June 6, 2019: 3A.

[116] Ibid.

election with 50.78% of the vote of nearly 1,500 attendees at the 2019 state convention.[117] The losing candidate represented the grassroots, anti-establishment wing of the party,[118] demonstrating a further move away from a bottom-up party building approach in favor of Whatley and his national party ties.

After the 2020 election, both the state party and elected Republicans from the state continued to unify around a Trump-centric identity. One catalyst for party support toward Trump was Trump himself, who invested heavily in the state in the leadup to the election.[119] Perhaps because North Carolina was the largest swing state won by Trump in 2020, Trump credited Whatley for fighting against voter fraud, calling him a "'stop the steal' guy".[120] Trump also headlined the North Carolina GOP state convention, one of his first appearances after the events of January 6th, 2021.[121] In turn, the House delegation from North Carolina stayed loyal to Trump: seven North Carolina House members signed onto the *amicus curiae* brief in *Texas v. Pennsylvania* (2020),[122] and many of these members also voted against certifying the electoral votes of the 2020 election.[123] On the other hand, both U.S. Senators Burr and Tillis were formally censured by the North Carolina GOP for voting to impeach Trump and for challenging Trump-supported causes, respectively.[124]

Whatley's tenure as chair was distinguished by a fight against alleged electoral fraud, national Republican politics, and support for Donald Trump. As previously mentioned, the state GOP dedicated significant resources toward "election integrity" in their July 2020 plan of organization, such as bringing in like-minded attorneys and legal experts into party leadership roles. Whatley also brought in out-of-state Republican operatives to help lead the party. First, he tapped Jason Doré as executive director of the party in 2020, whose credentials include previous executive director experience in the Louisiana GOP and working in the Trump administration.[125] A year later, Doré was succeeded by Jason Simmons, who previously worked as a campaign director for both the 2016 and 2020 Trump presidential campaigns.[126] Whatley's efforts to promote Trump were rewarded, being named General Counsel to the RNC in 2023 and, later,

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[117] Morrill, Jim and Anna Pogarcic. "Michael Whatley elected new chair of NC Republican Party, calls for a 'reset'." *Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)*, June 8, 2019.

[118] Morrill, Jim. "NC Republicans looking for 'fresh start' when they pick new chairman this weekend." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, June 6, 2019: 3A.

[119] Morrill, Jim. "'Still Trump's party': Like no one before, president has left his mark on GOP." *Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)*, January 3, 2021: 8A.

[120] "Sources: McDaniel out as RNC chair." *St. Paul Pioneer Press (MN)*, February 7, 2024: A28.

[121] Livingston, Ginger. "N.C. Republicans gearing up for '22 election cycle." *Daily Reflector, The (Greenville, NC)*, June 3, 2021.

[122] State of Texas v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, et al. 592 U.S. __. 2020.

[123] Murphy, Brian. "More NC Republicans say they'll object to presidential election results in Congress." *News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)*, January 5, 2021: 3A.

[124] "State party censures its own U.S. senator for vote to convict Trump." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The (GA)*, February 17, 2021: A4; Battaglia, Danielle. "GOP's censure of Sen. Tillis 'not helpful,' McHenry says." *Charlotte Observer, The (NC)*, June 16, 2023: 1A.

[125] "Longtime Louisiana party leader Doré now at N. Carolina GOP." *Associated Press State Wire: Louisiana (LA)*, May 21, 2020.

[126] Sullivan, Sean. "Nervous GOP pours money, personnel into North Carolina." *Standard-Examiner (Ogden, UT)*, September 13, 2016; Schechter, Maayan. "Trump's reelection campaign announces South Carolina team." *State, The (Columbia, SC)*, November 27, 2019: 3A.

RNC co-chair with Lara Trump in 2024.[127] Jason Simmons succeeded Whatley as North Carolina GOP chair.[128] Simmons had the endorsement of Whatley and Trump,[129] defeating a bottom-up grassroots candidate by greater than a two-to-one margin in the special chair election.[130]

Conclusion

Over the past few decades, the North Carolina Republican Party went from being heavily disconnected with the national trends of the Christian Right movement to almost overlapping entirely with the RNC after Donald Trump's 2016 election. Despite North Carolina electing Jesse Helms as a U.S. Senator to five terms, Helms neglected the potential long-term benefits to his ideological crusade vis a vis state-level investment and state party building– the polar opposite to Mitch McConnell in nearby Kentucky. Similarly, I observe virtually no grassroots presence of the Tea Party in the state in 2010, and only years later did a significant anti-establishment wing of the party gain appreciable traction. Finally, the North Carolina GOP's initial ambivalence toward Trump transformed into a closely knit network between North Carolina Republican leaders and the Trump administration within only a few years.

In this chapter, I showed that relatively recent developments in the North Carolina Republican Party set it on a path to converge with the ideological and electoral aims of Donald Trump and the Republican National Committee. The first signs of this change are noted with the changes to the state party rules in 2010 and the state GOP's increased willingness to receive national Republican Party attention in Pat McCrory's 2012 gubernatorial campaign. Since then, the Republican-controlled state legislature pushed for North Carolina's primaries to be moved up with the purpose of increasing its national presence. Trump's successful presidential election in 2016 was followed by the state party hiring national Trump-sympathetic leaders, alienating their own state Republican leaders, and adopting changes that catered to Trump's personal preferences (like disputes over election integrity).

As a case study, North Carolina stands out amongst the rest for its lack of strong evidence supporting the three hypotheses looked at in the dissertation. To be sure, the state-level institutions hypothesis resonates with the North Carolina GOP, albeit by the absence, not the presence, of tight linkages between political groups like the state party with Republican elected officials. However, the state party's direction has trended, for most of the period of study, decidedly national, leaving sub-national considerations in the lurch. For that reason, it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions about the state party hypothesis in North Carolina's case if the state GOP increasingly resembles the national party bylaws and rules instead. In a similar vein, support for the party competition hypothesis is also unclear in this case, owing to the state

[127] "National Republican Chairman to resign as NC GOP head - National Republican Chairman Whatley won't keep other job leading North Carolina GOP." *Winston-Salem Journal (NC)*, March 13, 2024: 6.
[128] "N.C. Republican Party: Jason Simmons Elected NCGOP Chairman." *Targeted News Service (USA)*, March 27, 2024.
[129] Ibid.
[130] "North Carolina GOP executive director elected as next state chairman." *Associated Press State Wire: North Carolina (NC)*, March 27, 2024.

party's peculiar tendency for its intraparty conflicts to both start late and to persist for a protracted period of time.

Broadly speaking, the North Carolina case is a clear-cut example of a state party nationalizing to emulate its national equivalent. Despite this, the state party's chair election in 2015 remains an aberration: electing a political novice stands in stark contrast to the 2012 and 2014 elections, which led to unified Republican control for the first time in North Carolina's history. This speaks to an ideological difference between Republicans in the state committees and Republicans convention delegates. The loud anti-establishment wing at the state convention pushed sufficiently for the election of an anti-establishment leader. Perhaps, then, the transition to embrace Trump Republicanism in North Carolina proceeded more smoothly as the anti-establishment Republican wing slowly absorbed into the party establishment themselves throughout Trump's first administration.

Both co-chairs of the RNC, Michael Whatley and Lara Trump, hail from North Carolina, and North Carolina GOP leadership stems from Whatley's influence. Therefore, it is likely that the state GOP continues to take national party cues and mold itself in the shape of the RNC. The historical lack of grassroots party building in the state party, the pattern of hiring out-of-state Republicans to leadership positions, and a strong executive committee and party chair combine to create a difficult status quo for any group– moderate, establishment, or anti-Trump conservative Republicans– to overcome.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have looked closely at eight state Republican parties during periods of heightened intraparty turbulence over the past several decades. The purpose of the body of work was to assess the extent to which intraparty conflict occurred at the state level of the Republican party and to understand the effects of any such intraparty conflict on the local, state, and national levels of the Republican party. Three of the most recent movements occurring throughout all levels–the Christian Right era, the Tea Party movement, and pro-Trump Republicanism over the past few election cycles– were the primary focus through which state parties were to be studied. Local, state, and national news sources, state laws, and party rules demonstrated that each state GOP has its own unique history with disparate historical contexts, developments, and outcomes.

That said, two larger patterns emerged from the review of all eight state Republican parties. First, the interplay of state law, elected officials, and the state party itself plays a crucial role in determining the extent of intraparty conflict. State regulations on political parties lends them credibility, creates accountability on behalf of the state's entire electorate, and keeps any intraparty disruptions from pushing the party too far off the path in the long run. Republican elected officials in the state are also able to influence the direction of their state party in myriad ways. In some cases, elected officials are granted formal membership to leadership committees or are given appointive power to them (such as in Pennsylvania or California), while in other cases a Republican governor might enjoy long-held, informal privileges like instituting their preferred choice for party chair (as seen in North Carolina when a Republican governor takes office). Second, the internal design of the state party matters significantly in terms of making it more or less susceptible to intraparty conflict. When and how a state party holds votes on its platform and leadership positions creates pathways to factional takeover in some cases and minimizes those opportunities in others.

After delving deeper into the patterns that emerged from the eight state parties under consideration, I consider three broader conclusions from the dissertation work. First, all state-level parties appear to be moving toward nationalization at varying speeds, which itself is heavily tied to the polarization of state parties. Second, I find that–despite the differences between state parties– the power of an average rank-and-file party member operating within their party is often understated. However, in recent years the potential influence of these rank-and-file members has been increasingly co-opted by outside, national-level organizations. I describe the struggle to conceptualize "grassroots" members of a political party given these trends. Third, the purpose of a political party–particularly at the state level– appears to be changing, and the relationship between democratic mechanisms and state party infrastructure actually seems to make the party less effective. Finally, I outline some directions for future research in this field.

The relationships between state law, elected officials, and the state party

The linkages between three connected, yet distinct, political groups help determine a state party's stability in the face of quickly-shifting political tides. Throughout the eight case studies, I

find that more connections between state government, Republican elected officials, and the state party lead to less frequent and less extreme intraparty conflict, in nearly unanimous support of the state-level institutions hypothesis.

First, more state regulation may help protect the state party from short-term disruptions. Parties regulated by the state may face disclosure rules, campaign finance laws, and compliance with state-mandated leadership structures and membership qualifications. When parties aren't regulated by the state, the prerogative can potentially be picked up and carried out by other political actors, like the state party itself, its party factions, or outside organizations. Therefore, the rapid influx of Tea Party members in some states' precincts and not others may be owed partially to whether or not the intraparty conflict could have resulted in drastic changes for the party or if such changes would take time to enact through official state government channels.

The Republican Party of Iowa's experience with the Tea Party movement is a positive example of how strong ties between the state and the parties may provide a barrier to intraparty conflict. Iowa state law lays out the entire leadership structure for the state parties and subjects them to annual audits of each party's rules and financial statements. The state and both of its major political parties also share a common goal: to keep their "first in the nation" status during presidential primary years. As a result, Iowa's caucuses have become a well-oiled machine: the caucuses and their schedules are codified in Iowa state law, the state parties raise money in conjunction with the national parties, and the entire state receives a huge economic boost and extensive national attention. While there are certainly other considerations as to why the Tea Party movement failed to launch in Iowa, the rigid operation of the Iowa GOP and lack of opportunities to influence state party rules or elections would nonetheless be a strong deterrent to Tea Party activists trying to maximize these types of opportunities.

In contrast to Iowa's strong cohesion between the state and its parties, other state parties covered in this dissertation are subjected to state laws that may leave them more prone to intraparty factionalism. For example, the state of Colorado passed ballot initiatives after the 2016 elections to eliminate the Colorado caucuses and allowed for unaffiliated voters to participate in any political party's primary. The state parties technically retain the ability to return to a caucus assembly each election cycle, but the lofty requirements to do so– a three-fourths vote by the party's central committee–have kept the primaries in place for the Colorado GOP each election cycle since. Voters, therefore, have little incentive to register under a specific political party, leaving the state parties to be composed of, and led by, more dedicated (and perhaps, more extreme) party members with each passing election cycle. While Colorado state law has done much to empower voters in recent times, the state parties themselves continue to be left unregulated by the state, leaving them free to organize and conduct themselves as they see fit. However, the lack of state oversight and laws dictating a party's leadership structure creates a strong incentive for those seeking party takeover by taking advantage of this flexibility. As I have described, the Colorado Republican Party has indeed been subject to significant intraparty factionalism, with many of its fights revolving around rules changes and the distribution of power between the chair and the rest of the party leadership.

Second, I find that tighter linkages between the state party and state elected officials helps keep the state party from straying too far into intraparty conflict. An elected official's influence within the state party happens formally (e.g. the institutional design of the party's leadership committees) or indirectly (through the candidate's own electoral successes, fundraising ability, and popularity in the state). Even in cases where state Republicans

legislatures have polarized over time,[1] there are a few explanations why party discord may be mitigated vis a vis their connections to the state party. First– and most obviously– some elected officials are able to directly serve in party leadership positions to shape the state party's platform, primary contests, and fundraising. Both of the California GOP's leadership committees, for example, grant intraparty influence to Republican elected officials, either through appointive power (in the state central committee) or direct membership (in the state executive committee). Several state GOPs, like in Michigan, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, at times have adopted informal rules such as allowing a Republican governor to essentially appoint the state party chair during their term in office. Second, the incumbency status of elected officials goes far within the party in terms of maximizing a party's limited resources and being protected from challengers during primary elections (so long as the official in question does not deviate too far from the party's base). Third, the motivations of elected officials working with the state party may be more attuned toward electoral success than grassroots party activists who may instead prioritize ideological purity. Repeated successful election cycles for Republicans up and down the ballot in Kentucky and Utah, for example, have created little opportunity for theoretical party disruptors who might otherwise seek influence by drawing on party members' dissatisfaction or desperation.

An argument could be made that party insurgents should gravitate toward solidly Republican districts, with the underlying logic that these outsider candidates would only have to win the primary election (their general election prospects for victory nearly assured). However, I find such cases to be rare. Intraparty challengers seem to perform the best in open races for safe Republican seats, but otherwise the incumbents of these elected offices enjoy overwhelming odds at reelection. Oftentimes, the upsets that have received the most media attention– especially in the Tea Party era– are the exceptions that prove the rule. Kentucky U.S. Senator Rand Paul's unexpected success is an example of this: in the absence of an incumbent in the race, rank-and-file Republicans in Kentucky seized the chance to elect Paul over Mitch McConnell's personal choice of candidate in the primary. Yet, Paul's victory overshadows the failure of the Tea Party movement to elect any of their other candidates in over twenty contested primaries against a Republican incumbent in Kentucky that year.

Features of the state party can create openings for national-level influence

The relationships a state party maintains with the state and its Republican elected officials appears to avert intraparty conflict more than it attracts. Yet, grassroots conservatives may target these very same state officials (including Republicans) and party leaders as being too mainstream, moderate, or pro-establishment. The party's internal rules, bylaws, and in some cases, mores are also able to determine the extent of intraparty conflict possible within the party, with specific emphasis on this grassroots conservative base. Like the state-level institutions hypothesis, I also find broad support of the state party hypothesis in nearly all cases.

[1] Shor, Boris, and Nolan McCarty. "Two decades of polarization in American state legislatures." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 3, no. 3–4 (2022): 343-370. 2022.

Voting power is a major institutional feature that consistently predicts intraparty discord across the eight case studies of the dissertation. A decisive feature of the state parties is to determine who elects officers and RNC delegates. Every state GOP's leadership committees and officers meet frequently throughout the year, but parties may nonetheless decide important party business at their annual state conventions. I find that parties that enact policy and elect their leadership via convention systems are more vulnerable to short-term disruptions. The explanation is simple: the cost and relative ease to mobilize members for a cause at an annual one- or two-day convention pales in comparison to the alternative of spending months and potentially years cultivating a party faction through more conventional avenues. Other parties elect their leadership through committee votes (e.g. Kentucky), informally line up their leadership years in advance (e.g. California) or don't hold a convention at all (e.g. Pennsylvania). In each of these cases, I have shown that the efforts of intraparty conflict arising from the grassroots level are severely hampered.

Conventions that elect the state party's delegates to the RNC, in particular, catch the eye of national-level groups and campaigns seeking influence through local-level avenues. I believe that this is why fervent supporters of presidential campaigns (like Pat Robertson's in 1988, Ron Paul's in 2008 and 2012, and Ted Cruz's in 2016) are common culprits causing significant intraparty conflict within several state parties. The straightforwardness of the strategy– learn how delegates are won in each state and maximize your candidate's chances of winning those delegates– is particularly appealing for presidential candidates lacking mainstream appeal (who may win primary contests through vote shares alone).

Yet, deciding delegates is just one agenda item to be determined on the state convention floor: other convention votes include officer elections, party platform planks, and ratification of rules changes. The first and foremost goal of these outsider, national groups is to secure delegates for their preferred candidate, but their ability to participate in additional convention business means that insurgents can co-opt the convention and shape the future of the state party without the express intent to do so. The pairing of delegation voting with other elements of the state party may result in insurgencies winning other votes as well with minimal effort since they have already been mobilized to the convention floor. No example is clearer than Iowa in 2012: Ron Paul supporters took over the state party, yet were generally uninterested in carrying out traditional state party roles. I think the ulterior motive of Republican movements has shifted over time, from one of ideological cohesion, to ideological purity in candidates, to cohesion favoring Donald Trump specifically.

In addition to voting power, state parties create their own schedule and can even set their primary election dates in some cases. I find that the more party operations are spread out throughout an election cycle, the less able are potential party factions to find a foothold. The potential explanation echoes a similar logic to voting power: when crucial party business is condensed (e.g. to a singular state convention), mobilizing a party faction becomes easier than trying to maintain itself as a permanent wing of the state party. In addition, a party's ability to be a perennially active part of its state's political system implies greater institutional capacity and resources emanating from the state party itself. For example, the California Republican Party spreads itself out: its state convention is held in odd-numbered years, it divides itself into a heavily stratified organizational structure, and has three leadership groups (a central committee, an executive committee, and a board of directors) that have their own meeting schedules throughout each year. On the other hand, the Michigan Republican Party is designed around sending participants from across the state to its biennial state convention. Not only is the

majority of state party business conducted at its state convention, but the convention itself is marketed similarly to the Iowa State Fair in terms of attempting to draw attention from national politicians and presidential candidates.

Nationalization and polarization in state Republican parties

A recurring theme throughout the dissertation has been the consideration of the dual forces of nationalization and polarization. First, I conclude that the nationalization of state Republican parties has occurred in all eight case studies to varying extents. A state party becoming more nationalized almost seems inevitable. Various forces at play (including topics outside the scope of this dissertation, like public opinion and media markets) tend to favor national-level salient political issues over state-specific ones. The superior reach and resources of national groups often leave state Republican parties with little agency– especially once the state party opens itself to direct cooperation with the RNC, such as in Michigan and Pennsylvania. As long as national-level outcomes are paired with local- and state-level decisions, the party will skew national. Once a state party looks nationally, it is difficult (if not impossible) for it to reestablish itself in terms of state-level policies and ideological goals. The closest instance of this effort comes from the California Republican Party's leadership: they strive to separate themselves from national Republican platform planks like immigration, comply with the Trump campaign (without overextending themselves to Trump or the RNC), and state their focus on local-level issues to win elections.

State Republican parties becoming more politically extreme is also apparent, albeit with less concrete evidence, which may contribute heavily to political polarization. Unless state party members are explicitly described (by themselves or others) in terms of ideology, it is difficult to compare them via traditional measures of polarization. Party platforms can provide some utility in certain cases (such as revealing the extent of Christian Right influence within the Iowa and California Republican parties during the 1980s and 1990s), although state party platforms have increasingly resembled each other by moving away from regional or state-specific political agendas.[2] Another class of statewide party leaders–elected officials– has already been explored in the literature,[3] showing that polarization of state legislators is widespread. As discussed above, we might assume that state parties with greater linkages to its more extreme Republican elected officials will have also polarized to some extent. In addition, I find no evidence of a state GOP across the case studies that sought ideological stances to the left of a hypothetical median state Republican elected official. Despite a lack of stronger evidence, therefore, it seems likely (for at least the eight state parties included in the dissertation) that party leadership and its rank-and-file members have also polarized ideologically. The exact origins and timing of polarization at the

[2] Hopkins, Daniel J., Eric Schickler, and David L. Azizi. "From many divides, one? The polarization and nationalization of American state party platforms, 1918–2017." *Studies in American Political Development* 36, no. 1 (2022): 1-20. 2022.

[3] Shor, Boris, and Nolan McCarty. "Two decades of polarization in American state legislatures." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 3, no. 3–4 (2022): 343-370. 2022; Handan-Nader, Cassandra, Andrew CW Myers, and Andrew B. Hall. "Polarization and state legislative elections." *American Journal of Political Science.* 2025.

state level, however, are inconclusive. Is a state GOP nominating more extreme candidates for state offices, or are more extreme candidates winning elections that are subsequently able to influence the state party? A third possibility–both state Republicans and the state party are taking cues simultaneously from another political actor, such as Donald Trump or the Trump-supported RNC – is also worthy of consideration. Future work examining more state GOPs can more definitively support what I suspect: the first two possibilities were commonplace (depending on the state party's institutional design), but the third possibility has become increasingly likely over time.

The struggle to define the term "grassroots"

On the one hand, the power of an individual rand-and-file member operating within a state party is grossly underestimated, even in today's political climate. To be sure, party rules can create or restrict opportunities for individual-level participation. In some cases, like Utah and Colorado, an individual can harness power within the party with fairly trivial levels of planning and organizing. For example, the Ruzicka family in Utah has held multiple state delegate seats for decades (with few exceptions) by virtue of navigating the Utah GOP's neighborhood caucus system and being passionate for their conservative causes. By organizing only a handful of caucus attendees in carefully chosen neighborhood caucuses, the Ruzickas enabled groups like the Eagle Forum and the conservative Republican Assembly to enjoy outsized representation in the Utah GOP.[4] In other cases, like North Carolina, the pathways to individual party participation appear to be open but simply aren't taken. Very few state parties offer little vertical mobility to politically-minded citizens, but the California GOP (with its heavily striated infrastructure) and Pennsylvania GOP (who have no local-level party system, do not hold state conventions, and are almost entirely led by the chair and state committee) stand out.

Unfortunately, this democratic ideal of the average citizen making a difference in their preferred political party is becoming increasingly scarce. The powers granted to individuals by the state party system are almost always co-opted by outsider groups or national campaigns. While I believe that national attention on state political parties has increased over time, this is hardly a new phenomenon: members of Pat Robertson's 1988 presidential campaign targeted state GOPs with grassroots-friendly designs, as in Michigan, in order to gain delegates through its convention system. In the dissertation, I found that the areas with the greatest Tea Party successes often arose due to national Tea Party networks, like the Tea Party Express, investing in state-level contests and state party representation. Only a few years later, I described how the presidential campaign of Ted Cruz and supportive outsider groups operated similarly– by recruiting neighborhood-level citizens to run as delegates for the purpose of national-level goals (i.e. RNC delegates) in states like Colorado. Paradoxically, it would seem that "grassroots" members take marching orders from the top-down more than ever.

Intraparty conflict increasingly being waged by larger, national-level forces has caused the term "grassroots" to lose much of its meaningful context. Defining the concept has been challenging in political science research: Neuse (1983) opines that the term has a "morass-like

[4] Rolly, Paul. "The Rolly Report." *Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)*, February 11, 1996: A2.

quality".[5] Oftentimes, the closest description to the term comes from words used synonymously alongside it: decentralized, bottom-up, spontaneous, community-driven, and so on. Given the propensity for what is now referred to as astroturfing– larger organizations or movements operating behind local activity–future researchers should ask themselves what they aim to capture by referring to the "grassroots". In this dissertation, I have tried using the term sparingly but suggest using other terms to avoid confusion.

The changing role of the state party

What is the role of the state party? Political science research has tackled this question for some time (e.g. Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1989), but the state parties themselves will also disagree on their purpose vehemently.[6] Some may say their purpose is to win elections, while others say it is to pursue ideological goals. I find that while both of these types of state Republican parties existed in the past and exist today, party organizations functioning akin to an ideological pressure group have become much more commonplace than parties focusing primarily on the electoral connection. If parties seek to win state-level elections, it may most commonly be through candidates' eschewing of state-specific policy in favor of national-level ideology.

This trend appears to track closely to the trend of the state parties nationalizing, particularly in the era of pro-Trump Republicanism. State-level Republican candidates and state parties define themselves in terms of their extent of support of Donald Trump, with little emphasis on their other merits or state-level policy goals. Many cases of adherence to this emerging national ideology supports the idea that state Republican parties increasingly serve a role of promoting the national Republican Party. Evidence of this strategy to win elections, on the other hand, is mixed. The 2022 election cycle demonstrated as much: frequently, Donald Trump's hand-chosen candidates for state offices easily cleared their respective primaries, only to lose more general election contests than they won. Michigan and Pennsylvania are the clearest cases of pro-Trump Republican failures in 2022's elections.

The changing nature of a state party's role creates a recurring ambiguity found throughout some of the cases in the dissertation– how to measure the success (or failure) of a party faction seeking to influence a state party. In some aspects, for example, Iowa and Michigan's social conservatives were monumentally successful in putting pressure on their own Republican elected officials and changing their state party platforms to reflect pro-life policy. Yet, in neither state party did social conservatives attempt to achieve beyond their ideological goals, such as running for party officer positions or recruiting like-minded Republicans to run for office.

The Tea Party era created similarly ambiguous conclusions. In multiple states, like California, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, the Tea Party movement was almost immediately accepted or co-opted by the respective state GOP with little friction between the two groups. In

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[5] Neuse, Steven M. "From grass roots to citizen participation: Where we've been and where we are now." *Public Administration Quarterly* (1983): 294-309. 1983.

[6] Erikson, Robert S., Gerald C. Wright Jr, and John P. McIver. "Political parties, public opinion, and state policy in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 83, no. 3: 729-750. 1989.

theory, this could be considered a success for the Tea Party if the aim was only to seek legitimacy or recognition within the state's Republican party framework. However, the influence of Tea Party Republicans on elections in these states was negligible– the candidates elected in these states appeared no different than if the Tea Party were completely absent. Furthermore, the Tea Party ideology was either brushed aside (as in the cases of Pennsylvania's and North Carolina's Republican parties) or were already integrated into the state party beforehand (as in the California GOP). Throughout each case study, I tried to highlight both electoral outcomes and ideological shifts within the party (usually through leadership elections), but understanding a movement's extent of success at navigating intraparty conflict within a state GOP is difficult and requires context of the state party years before and years after such a period of conflict.

Future directions for research

The qualitative approach the dissertation grounds itself in partially stems from significant state-by-state variation in data availability. Future work could drill down on individual state parties to understand, in greater depth, the relationships between a state party, candidates, outside organizations, and the RNC. One clear approach to take is campaign finance: important contributions to extant literature on polarization focuses nearly exclusively on finances.[7] Early versions of the dissertation sought to include campaign finance data to understand how state-level candidates were funded over time, but state-level variation in disclosure rules and party finances made comparison between states too challenging. In some states, a party's finances must be disclosed, like Iowa's political parties, whereas other state party's financial situations are metaphorically black boxes. It is reasonable to suspect that a party's ability to finance itself independently would be able to better weather outsider contributions during turbulent Republican political movements. Conversely, state parties in need of financial relief might view working with the RNC as the easiest pathway to secure financial aid– even if such aid would primarily go to fundraising for national candidates.

By virtue of selecting eight case studies out of a pool of fifty state Republican parties, future work could also continue to focus on breadth over depth by expanding the number of case studies. The state parties selected for the dissertation were meant to be at least superficially representative of the country and to capture most of the spectrum of outcomes; however, there are many state Republican parties that have faced as extreme or more extreme intraparty conflict as the ones covered in the dissertation. Just a few examples include Arizona (where national Republican leaders opted to funnel money around the Arizona GOP due to a controversial chair election),[8] Georgia (where Governor Brian Kemp and other Republican leaders operate mostly independently of the Georgia GOP due to infighting),[9] and Nevada (whose GOP censured their own Secretary of State for certifying the state's 2020 presidential election votes).[10] Having a

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[7] La Raja, Raymond J. "Campaign Finance and Partisan Polarization in the United States Congress." *Duke J. Const. L. & Pub. Pol'y* 9 (2014): 223. 2014.

[8] Glazer, Emily. "Arizona GOP Debates Who Should Control Political Purse Strings". *The Wall Street Journal*. May 8, 2019.

[9] Bluestein, Greg. "Georgia GOP chair's impartiality questioned after Republican primary." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The: Web Edition Articles (GA)*, June 3, 2022.

[10] Smith, John L. "Cegavske censure, anti-mask madness: Spring is in the air for Nevada GOP." *Nevada Independent, The (Las Vegas, NV)*, April 18, 2021.

baseline of various outcomes established through the dissertation work, future work may move next to the most troubled state parties– or perhaps, the least troubled ones– and provide further understanding for what leads to successes or failures for the party.

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